



This is a digital copy of a book that was preserved for generations on library shelves before it was carefully scanned by Google as part of a project to make the world's books discoverable online.

It has survived long enough for the copyright to expire and the book to enter the public domain. A public domain book is one that was never subject to copyright or whose legal copyright term has expired. Whether a book is in the public domain may vary country to country. Public domain books are our gateways to the past, representing a wealth of history, culture and knowledge that's often difficult to discover.

Marks, notations and other marginalia present in the original volume will appear in this file - a reminder of this book's long journey from the publisher to a library and finally to you.

Usage guidelines

Google is proud to partner with libraries to digitize public domain materials and make them widely accessible. Public domain books belong to the public and we are merely their custodians. Nevertheless, this work is expensive, so in order to keep providing this resource, we have taken steps to prevent abuse by commercial parties, including placing technical restrictions on automated querying.

We also ask that you:

- + *Make non-commercial use of the files* We designed Google Book Search for use by individuals, and we request that you use these files for personal, non-commercial purposes.
- + *Refrain from automated querying* Do not send automated queries of any sort to Google's system: If you are conducting research on machine translation, optical character recognition or other areas where access to a large amount of text is helpful, please contact us. We encourage the use of public domain materials for these purposes and may be able to help.
- + *Maintain attribution* The Google "watermark" you see on each file is essential for informing people about this project and helping them find additional materials through Google Book Search. Please do not remove it.
- + *Keep it legal* Whatever your use, remember that you are responsible for ensuring that what you are doing is legal. Do not assume that just because we believe a book is in the public domain for users in the United States, that the work is also in the public domain for users in other countries. Whether a book is still in copyright varies from country to country, and we can't offer guidance on whether any specific use of any specific book is allowed. Please do not assume that a book's appearance in Google Book Search means it can be used in any manner anywhere in the world. Copyright infringement liability can be quite severe.

About Google Book Search

Google's mission is to organize the world's information and to make it universally accessible and useful. Google Book Search helps readers discover the world's books while helping authors and publishers reach new audiences. You can search through the full text of this book on the web at <http://books.google.com/>

LIFE AND BOOKS



F.F. LEIGHTON

LIFE AND BOOKS



UNWIN BROTHERS, THE GRESHAM PRESS, WOKING AND LONDON

LIFE AND BOOKS

BY

F. F. LEIGHTON



LONDON

T. FISHER UNWIN

PATERNOSTER SQUARE

1899

(All rights reserved.)

TO
A. M. AND W. M.

WHEN whoso merely hath a little thought
Will plainly think the thought which is in him,
Not imaging another's bright or dim,
Not mangling with new words what others taught,
When whoso speaks, from either having sought
Or only found, will speak not just to skim,
A shallow surface with words made and trim,
But in that very speech the matter brought;
Be not too keen to cry, "So this is all,"
A thing *I* might myself have thought as well,
But would not say it, "for it was not worth."
Ask is this truth? For it is still to tell
That, be the theme a point, or the whole earth,
Truth is a circle perfect, great or small.

FROM *The Germ*.

CONTENTS

CHAP.	PAGE
I. IN MY MIND'S EYE, HORATIO . . .	1
II. MEN'S WOMEN AND WOMEN'S WOMEN IN MODERN NOVELS . . .	35
III. THE NUDE IN MODERN ART . . .	81
IV. CHICKWEED . . .	105
V. THE MUSICAL REMINISCENCES OF AN UN- MUSICAL PERSON . . .	123
VI. A LITERARY REFORMER . . .	147
VII. I TEMPI PASSATI . . .	191
VIII. ORIGINALITY . . .	227

"IN MY MIND'S EYE, HORATIO"

I

"IN MY MIND'S EYE, HORATIO"

WHEN Mr. Francis Galton suggested an investigation into what he graphically termed "the visualising faculties," he was the first to give a specific and descriptive title to a certain remarkable power of mental vision, to recognise that it is part of the intellectual attributes of all mankind, and to infer that it must be specially developed in men of genius. Long before this scientific recognition and Mr. Galton's desire for as exact an analysis of it as could be gained, poets had already given such clear descriptions of it as prove they were conscious of it and of its influence on their art.

Shakespeare's poet's eye in a fine frenzy rolling, giving to airy nothings a local habitation and a name; Wordsworth's "that inward eye which is the bliss of solitude," are very clear definitions of the visualising faculty; but it is not only poets who possess it, it is the distinguishing gift of all

artists and painters; it is, in short, the very spirit of Art itself, not wholly content with the works of external Nature, but transforming and re-creating them to accord with higher ideals; achieving this by rejection and choice, half voluntary and unconscious; half conscious, the result of careful study, training, and observation. It is by its means that artists reproduce the impressions of form, colour and sound as they strike the finer nerves, and awaken associations, aspirations, and sad or glad humours. For, according to Zola's keen saying, "Art is Nature seen through a temperament," which means, not by the physical eye only, but by the inward eye, which has the more penetrating vision, and which can fill the mind with beautiful forms, harmonious and significant colours, and lovely images.

It is on the vividness and definiteness with which an artist, in any medium, visualises his subject from the first, that the success of his work must depend. He has to rouse similar emotions, similar pictures to his own in the minds of his readers or beholder, and unless he has full possession of his subject he can make no effect on others. Therefore some inquiry into the means by which the visualising faculties act may be interesting, especially as the sustained power of using them, which the poet or artist brings to his work, is an admirable, indeed almost infallible, test of his genius.

But before applying this test to the works of the poet or genius, it may be well to consider, too, the part which the visualising faculties play in ordinary cases. For every one possesses them in a higher or lower degree, though with unimaginative people they manifest themselves fitfully and uncertainly, generally merely as a kind of pictorial memory, by which the face and form of some dearly loved friend, or the salient point of some interesting scene can be recalled, and the mental pictures thus produced are often blurred and indistinct. But even in these cases they are always stimulated to extraordinary activity by any great nerve shock, which sometimes seems to lift ordinary mortals to the same height of mental visions as the poets. This shock is generally caused by the sudden death of the beloved; sometimes, though this is rarer, it springs from reaction after the commission of some impulsive crime. In either case the result is similar; the mourner is constantly haunted by what he believes the visible presence of his beloved; the criminal constantly sees the evidence of his crime in empty space, or the image of his victim appears to him suddenly in the moments of triumph and success won by some crafty treachery or murder.

The part which the emotions play in this singular power of beholding the non-existent is very remarkable, and may probably be the cause of some of the many ghost stories which

baffle precise investigation. The survivor of one dearly loved thinks of little else, recalls in every detail the looks and gestures of the lost one, dwelling on the thoughts of such and such appearances, "he looked so when we were last in this place," then raising sad eyes of longing sees the ardently desired form, either mirrored on the vacant air by the force of loving imagination, or else catches sight of some person with a faint, or perhaps, even no resemblance to the loved form, transfigures it and believes in it, sometimes even obeying its supposed behests, and considering its appearance an evidence of existence after death.

Even so strongly practical and sceptical a mind as Francis Place's was not free from a predisposition to this form of hallucination. In his touching account of his sorrow after his first wife's death he speaks of the sense of expectancy when he heard a footstep, of looking up and fancying she would come through the opening door. In more emotional and excitable minds, less carefully balanced and eager for miracles, these sensations might soon resolve themselves into a strong impression of actual presence.

Of course with uneducated people there would, in these cases, be no pause for analysis or reasoning, only the credulity of passionate love, and vivid, excited feelings. And moreover this power of visualising under special circumstances is emi-

nently sympathetic, so that when the ghost-seer relates his experiences, he finds eager listeners who cling to the trust that death only transfers the dead to another country, where they still keep a remembrance of this earth, and are able to resume its language, and even its corporeal appearances, for the sake of the loved ones left behind.

In the other cases where this faculty for seeing in empty space the image which preoccupies both the mind and emotions is stimulated by the stinging power of conscience, it acts with special influence on impulsive natures, such as Macbeth's, who sees images in the empty air immediately after his rash crime.

Shakespeare indeed realised the tragic aspects of the visualising power as vividly as its poetic ones. He knew that ever on the track of the murderer follow keen-eyed suspicion and excited remorse, and that to their intent gaze the evidences of guilt faintly mirrored, as it were, on the very air, become tangible and perceptible. But it would be emphasising the obvious to dwell on the power with which he makes the invisible visible to Macbeth, Lady Macbeth, Hamlet. For each of these he creates an outward manifestation to accord with the inward temperament, and with the special conditions of a special crime. And it is significant that all the supposed appearances, specially those of the ghosts, are suggested by

some murder, as yet unknown to law, but crying aloud for vengeance—picturesque and impressive circumstances calculated to inflame the imagination, and through it the visualising faculty.

Now visions and ghosts seen in this way are treated as something quite distinct and apart from those creations of the poet which we recognise as due to the working of his imagination ; but it seems more than probable that the visualising faculty is the chief agent in the apparition of *all* non-tangible people and objects. But in the case of the poet or genius the temperament predominates, and gives special form or colour to the vision, we acknowledge that what he describes is from his imagination, and that by its power he often throws a glory or beauty round objects whose significance we had hitherto failed to perceive. While, too, the visualising faculties of ordinary people generally lie dormant till roused by some shock, and then act exclusively on the object which has excited them, the poet's, on the contrary, are rarely quiescent ; he is conscious of his moulding power, and others are dimly aware that the world shows to him a different aspect ; but the beings he is said to create are never mistaken for real ones, though they are far more real than those ghostly ones who also owe their existence to excited emotion and fancy.

It is by these visualising powers that poets have peopled the world with lovers, and heroes and

heroines, whose lives and loves and sufferings are as real to many of us as those of our actual friends, and it is in proportion to the vivid intensity of these powers, that they have seized the imagination of the world and rule it for ever. This creative power of genius is much higher than the mere pictorial memory of the ordinary man, for it is essentially discriminating, registering, choosing, combining, seizing the essential and significant, eliminating the trivial and commonplace. It is keen to recognise the symbolism underlying all life and nature, to suggest an interpretation, to perceive the greatness of that which seems homely, the littleness of much that is highly esteemed. And it reproduces the objects of life in such a form that others shall perceive in them new characteristics and higher interests than they were conscious of before.

The poet is indeed the interpreter in the House Beautiful, pointing out to us the beauty and significance, which our duller senses would have missed; but even he cannot exercise his marvellous gifts except on the tangible objects by which he is surrounded, and thus, even in his imaginative descriptions, he shows us true glimpses of the world in which he lived and moved and had his being, and we can reconstruct it from the pictures he has left us; only if our own powers of mental vision are sluggish and feeble, or if we read carelessly without

pausing to realise, we shall miss the significance and power of his genius.

This power of visualising was perhaps more extraordinarily developed in Dante than in any other poet since the ancients. His Hell and Purgatory and Heaven are no vague expressions, they are definite, and can be mapped out precisely, and in all the torments he inflicts he evidently *sees* the working of the torture, the twitching soles of the sinners tortured head downwards in fiery tombs, Agnello in the grasp of the serpent, gaping, fainting. He visualises beauty as keenly, and gives us the impression of the exquisite freshness of the morning, the radiant glory of colour, while Beatrice's loveliness is so great that she must refrain from smiling, lest her too great glory should annihilate her still earthly lover. His angels impress us with a sense of beauty, power, and reality, radiant and lovely as the spring, or moving solemnly in dusky garments, preoccupied with serious missions; while his devils are as devilish as Goethe's, "tubby, scrubby, right breed they, true stock."

But though Dante's intensely religious and artistic temperament enabled him to give descriptions of the supernatural world, in which he believed so ardently, in such shape and clearness that we accept them without being startled by incongruity, or revolted by a too disturbing

sensation of the impossible, yet even he sometimes lets us catch through the smoke and flames of Hell, through the dim light of Purgatory, or the brilliance of Heaven, glimpses of the earthly sources of his inspiration. The fierce chambers of Hell, with their licking flames, are as the glass furnaces of Venice, or the iron foundries of her great Arsenal, the gloomy wood where he first met Virgil can be identified, so too the mountains which did not seem to him sublime or delectable, but evoked only the thought of weary journeys, unknown dangers, barriers impassable, except at imminent risk of life and limb, cold and solitude. His heaven is expressed in the radiant colours of the rainbow, in form of a rose, while the fireflies of his beloved Italy may well have first drawn his attention to the beauty of winged and moving flame.

As then Dante evidently *saw* all that he described, vividly and distinctly, he has tempted many illustrators to their undoing, for the change of the medium of expression is fatal. Line and colour cannot give even a hint of that intense, austere, wonderfully indignant, yet devout and loving temperament of his, which everywhere pervades the poem and makes its atmosphere. And failing this, all that is left to the illustrator are horrible sufferings in concrete form, without any explanatory justification, grotesque attitudes, symbolic figures and colours, the mere outside shell.

Moreover, the dominant idea of the poem, the absolute doctrine of the eternal punishment of the wicked, and the reward of the good and orthodox, is now being increasingly recognised as a crude form of religious belief. And for this reason, as well as its stiff Mediævalism, it seems too probable that the *Divine Comedy*, despite its magnificent poetry, will lose its hold on even poetic imaginations, and be less and less read.

It is otherwise with Chaucer, who cared little about purely abstract or moral questions, but delighted in man's life on earth, which he portrayed not only with love and humour, but with so keen an eye for pictorial effect as has made the Pilgrims, collectively and individually, the most delightful of subjects for pictures and decorations. He draws with singular precision the varied types of humanity, the hypocrite, the countryman, the knight, the prioress; and his portraits are not mere catalogues, he sizes the characteristic, about which we hear so much just now, with marvellous precision. The dainty affectations of the lady, the coarse sensuality of the bourgeoisie, the gravity of the knight are conveyed in their personal descriptions, as well as in the stories they choose to tell.

In Chaucer we get lovely glimpses of sweet landscapes, given evidently from the impression they had made on his mind, rather than from merely looking at meadows and valleys and then

writing down that they were green and luxuriant. We have instead their peacefulness, their evidence of the successful labour of man, his careful tillage, his trust in the lands yielding fruits of increase, in short, a view of Nature rendered by a singularly sweet and humane temperament. In Chaucer too we get for the first time a curiously frank, personal description, so detached that it seems written by some one else, who notes certain peculiarities with an amused smile. It is the beginning of that recognition of man's dual and individual nature which can project itself so that it can see itself in a mirror, a faculty which is now exercising so great an influence in literature. In our own poetry we get from Chaucer the first instance of self-analysis and description, the first case of visualising self.

Shakespeare gives us no such inestimable glimpse of his own personality. His mission as a dramatic artist led necessarily to self-repression, but he possessed the visualising faculty in a supreme degree; he must have *seen* his characters group themselves with picturesque effect, have beheld Juliet in her balcony, Miranda in her cave, Titania with her asinine lover. He certainly saw each one of his heroines mentally as he created them, very definitely; he knew the colour of their eyes and hair, the dark or fair of their complexions, and he was resolute to convey his knowledge of their beauty to his readers, but

here he was confronted with the old difficulty which realists and impressionists are still seeking to solve. And it is very interesting to trace how in his later, finer plays he cast aside the mere descriptive cataloguing of certain features, as Olivia's, "item, two lips indifferent red," &c., Julia's clever comparison of herself with Sylvia's portrait, the "one with hair of auburn, the other perfect yellow," to the final triumph of Cleopatra, "Age cannot wither her, nor custom stale her infinite variety," the finest description of a beautiful, voluptuous woman perhaps ever given.

Just as Tennyson tells us his mind was ever filled with the haunting music of his verse, so we cannot but think Shakespeare's, besides this ever-present sense of music, was filled also with beautiful or awe-inspiring pictures, and we know from many proofs that he fully recognised the power of the visualising faculties, and the part they often play in the destiny of man.

With Milton the passionate love of the beautiful, which must be the distinguishing mark of the poet (whatever his medium) is crossed and, as it were, thwarted by the dominant Puritanism of his day. It was so thoroughly in the air that it affected even his genius painfully. For the Puritans aimed at finishing the work of the Reformation, and at finally and for ever dividing Art and Religion. It was a most difficult task, for they went right athwart some of the most

deeply rooted instincts of humanity, but they succeeded only too well, and they implanted a haunting distrust of Beauty in the religious mind of England from which she is yet striving to free herself. And they left their destructive mark not only on such ecclesiastical art as was still left, but also on literature. The poetry of Milton shows its traces. He is poised as it were between two worlds: the coming scepticism cast a faint but perceptible shadow over his conceptions of the heavenly regions, while the prevailing narrow doctrinal religion, which was the strongest force of his time, assuredly interfered with the vision of his inward eye and disturbed its serenity. His supernatural regions are less spiritual and ethereal than those of Dante, and at the same time less real, at least they do not convey the same impression of intense and passionate conviction of reality.

His limbo, for instance, is a dreary bit of work, with evidences of very defective visualisation, and the fluttering cowls and monkish garments have an incongruous and trivial effect now that their symbolism has no longer the same significance and importance. It was in hearing rather than in seeing that the great bard found his highest development and consolation, and this I think, less on account of his physical blindness, than because his mind was preoccupied with ardent intellectual studies, and political and religious

problems, which must have absorbed much of his thought and diverted his attention from those external objects which should make so lasting and vivid an impression on the mind. We can trace the disastrous effects of the stormy religious and political passions, which strike an almost discordant note in Milton's poetry, in nearly all the poetry written after his time. The deepening sense of man's individual and collective sinfulness so insisted on by the Puritans, and illustrated as it were by Charles the Second's court, broadened at last into a chasm which severed Nature from Grace, using that word in its doctrinal and evangelical meaning. The result was a worldliness which, while professing to cultivate beauty, excluded all religion; and a religiousness which condemned all beauty as sinful worldliness.

Poets indeed have never wholly ceased in this land of England, but poetry has suffered many vicissitudes, and after Milton's time it ceased to be nationally representative, and split up into various schools. Poets had to choose between the regular classicism and conventional construction of Pope and Gray, with trivial and social themes, accurate, but of no great power or depth; or, if they expressed personal feelings, they were generally of a purely religious kind, the morbid misery of Cowper; for with the religious minded all purely human interests and delight in art, all joy of living was thought

worldly, until we get the inevitable reaction and result in Wordsworth.

The dominating, absorbing interest in humanity which marked the earlier poets, as Chaucer and Shakespeare, reaches almost dwindling point in him, to be replaced by unabashed egotism, and he turns with something of scorn from his fellow mortals to console and delight himself with the beautiful scenery, and manifold forms of Nature, giving too in these things eyes to the blind, and ears to the deaf, that seeing and hearing they might at least also understand the beauties of scenery.

But it was not mere sensuous delight in the beautiful forms and colours of natural scenery which alone allured Wordsworth; he sought for the hidden teachings of Nature, to pierce through her symbolism, and to store his mind with such permanent impressions and memories as should brighten his solitude, and raise him above ignoble thoughts. This could only be achieved by the visualising faculties, and how high a value he set on these is proved, not only by the well-known lines on the daffodils, but in many other poems, notably those on Yarrow, where he exhorts readers to impress on their minds such vivid memories of beautiful scenes as may for ever remain with them in a picture gallery visible only to the inward eye. With this motive for studying landscape, what was only the background naturally

becomes the foreground, human interests shrink away, and seem transitory in face of the eternal forms of Nature, and it is not till after prolonged study that man discovers that these too are ever changing and passing away.

In Keats and Shelley the purely poetic temperament reasserts itself, dominates and overwhelms all other emotions; true impressionists as well as realists, we are struck less by the objects they describe than by the attributes and atmosphere through which they glorify them. To both of them the idea of beauty was absorbing; they thirsted for it in its fulness, not here and there in a costly picture, or isolated form, but they fell on evil times, when the English generally, and the middle class English in particular, were yet under the yoke of Puritanism, contented themselves with ugly forms and ugly colours for their everyday life, and looked askance at Art, still regarding it less as the great revealer of beauty than the tempter to sensuality. These people considered it as something quite divorced from natural human interests, and thought of it either as prompting carnal desires and leading to sin and immorality, or else a costly luxury, the sign of extreme wealth or long inheritance.

The poet, a lover of the beautiful, who considered poetry something other than a melodious moral treatise, had little then on which to feed

his inspiration except natural scenery. He could not, like Shakespeare, fully appease his desires through his eye, specially indoors, for household decorations were at their ugliest. The luminous old tapestries were moth-eaten at last, and had not even been replaced by the story of the prodigal or German hunting in water work, but by very transitory wall-papers, generally of hideous design and colour. The carven chests in which an Iachimo might hide were set aside for chests of drawers, many of them painted imitation; the once rush-strewn floors were covered with carpets of terrible floral patterns and brilliant hues, and the aim of every householder was to have everything as solid and as good, *i.e.*, as heavy and, seemingly, as ugly as possible. Even the dress of the women could not escape the baleful influence of the prevailing utter lack of taste, and was as disfiguring as it was unhealthy.

The case was hopeless; lovers of the beautiful could not even glorify the objects which surrounded them by any heightening touches of the imagination. They were obliged to content themselves either with external nature, or with wistful glances at the past, and the vanished grace of a day that was gone, or by creating mentally a fantastic world of loveliness which overpassed the possibilities of reality, and was out of touch with the lives and aspirations of their

general readers. And so we find a chasm which separates certain recent poetry in great measure from real life, and creates a dream world, full of ethereal beauty, to which souls, stricken and tormented by the universal ugliness, could fly for refuge for a season. And partly because of this, poetry has been degraded somewhat from her high place, and regarded with suspicion by those who were still in the bondage of Puritan prejudices. For it is impossible for the external and material world to suffer loss of beauty without the spiritual world being sympathetically affected, and undoubtedly there has been a great and serious loss in the general blinding of the artistic sense which has been going on for so many years. Men are becoming conscious of this at last, and their struggles towards recovery are sometimes pathetic and sometimes ludicrous.

Dissatisfied with the present, seeing its ugly dulness and triviality, they turn for inspiration to the past, or to Nature, or substitute analysis and psychology for the more natural themes of passion and beauty.

William Morris, as poet, turned resolutely to the past, refusing even to see such moral and social advance as may be hidden under the unpicturesque present, while, as artist, he scorned what many think its higher developments, and strove to revive the perception of beauty by reforming the decoration of everyday life. Here,

too, it is significant that, instead of aiming at originality, he sought to recover the forms and colours of antique workmanship.

Tennyson, unheeding FitzGerald's advice, sought mediævalism for his most important poems, finding in its gorgeous pageantry pictures which appealed to his sensuous delight in colour.

Dante Gabriel Rossetti, as poet as well as painter, gazed inward on his ideal woman, mirrored in his own heart; wrote to her yearning sonnets, and painted her in various guises; while Swinburne caught the long-resounding echo of Greek poetry and vivified his own with it.

And it is perhaps significant that our two finest modern poets, Christina Rossetti and Tennyson, have both in their poems built themselves a refuge for their souls from the ugliness of everyday life, the man's a palace of art, the woman's a garden of beauty and life. It is most interesting to compare and contrast these poems; both have the same tragic ending, an outcast soul bewailing a lost paradise. Perhaps if the everyday objects of the outward world had corresponded more nearly to a poetic ideal, neither of these had been written.

That external beauty is necessary for sustained and wholly satisfactory poetic inspiration is no fanciful theory; that the arts are dependent on

one another, that the neglect of art beauty leads to the loss of the poetic impulse, seems curiously illustrated in the intellectual history of Germany, during the last three centuries, when the plastic arts were at their lowest ebb, and the physical eye denied the sight of beauty of colour and form, except in external nature.

If ever true poetry could have been produced by earnest and enthusiastic study, by careful criticism, by resolute aspiration, Germany, from the time of Lessing until now, would have had her poetic procession of great singers. What his work and that of his contemporaries was, towards the formation of a grand national poetry and literature, can only be faintly realised, except indeed by students willing and able to go through the tedious drudgery and boredom of apprising native literature as it existed (it cannot be said to have lived) before their labours, and their heroic efforts to reform its weary wastes of commonplace dreariness.

That they were the forerunners of Goethe and Schiller and made them possible, was doubtless glorious achievement, but the promising, fertilising river of German poetry soon ran dry in the tender rivulets of Heine's exquisite verse, and Germany's true poets, whom all the world knows and honours, are, S. Bach, Mozart, Beethoven, Wagner, men who achieved in music (an art less dependent on sight than any other, and which can

dispense with description without loss of significance) fame as great and widespread as Dante's, Chaucer's, Shakespeare's, Francia's, Pisano's, and Raphael's in poetry and the plastic arts.

For no nation or people can claim poetic or art supremacy on the strength of an isolated or occasional genius; there must be great schools and inheritances of achievements, long pedigrees of poets, artists, musicians, developing, vivifying, transforming the arts they practise, enriching each one with their own special temperament; men who can make not only the hearts of their own folk thrill with hearty response, but who touch, too, the chords to which all humanity vibrates. And it is noteworthy that Germany, through her genius for music, is being led to the study of pictorial effect, in arranging groups for the stage. Wagner's operas, for instance, form a series of tableaux which would have their effect even were the music silent. Is it perhaps through music, the most abstract of the arts, that Germany shall again pass onward to the study of concrete form, with enlarged insight into its beauty, returning, as some think we are all destined to do, to the early starting-point?

Naturally the influences which told against the highest poetry and made visualising as much pain as pleasure, proved equally disastrous to other arts, specially to that of painting; indeed, here the greater the artist's gifts, the more did he

show the adverse effects of an uncongenial environment. Surrounded by the ugly and unpaintable, artists had no alternative but to throw themselves on the past and choose classical or conventional subjects, from which all true life had evaporated, or to accept the commonplace and substitute for loftier achievements, extreme dexterity of imitation, mere technical skill, and an appeal to sentiment. They naturally rebelled, and the more highly gifted, perhaps with true English love of precedent, turned for inspiration to the past, and as Pre-Raphaelites strove once more to begin at the beginning, reviving angular ill-drawn ascetic forms and quaint but sometimes beautiful colour effects. As well might they have tried to revive the tender young poetry of Chaucer by anachronisms of grammar and archaic language. The Philistine laughed and stared with untouched, unresponsive feelings; the adorers of the precious gushed, but so artificial a movement was predoomed.

D. G. Rossetti soon returned to his dreams and painted pictures more or less beautiful in colour, but wholly lacking in that virility and variety which is the distinguishing mark of high, or, at least, of highest art.

Millais accepted his fate, and we will hope found compensation for painting passing fashions, when fashions were perhaps at their very ugliest, in fortune and renown. But it is painful to feel

that a painter of so much genius should have thrown away so much power, for with very few exceptions his works show too plainly the influences of his uncongenial environment.

With the greatest of them all, Burne-Jones, the dominant desire of beauty, as in Keats, overpowers all other aspirations. He too, therefore, turns to the past, but not quite as the Pre-Raphaelites; the form is to him less than the spirit. Then, by the intense power of his visualising gift, he looks back through the ages; sees Pygmalion at work, the slow rising of love and light in his statue; sees the women yearning for love, while the knights gaze through the window and ride away; sees the eyes of Merlin glazing under the wiles of Vyvyan; the angels hymning the glories of creation; and the princess awakening under her lover's kiss. Yet, though Burne-Jones has divorced his art from the ordinary life of his time, he has redeemed it from artificiality by the beauty and significance of his colouring, and by the vividness of his genius; more fully still by that power of spiritualising, of rendering the inward and spiritual grace by the outward and visible sign, which divides genius from mere imitative skill and mechanical excellence.

He, in common with all poets and artists of genius, feels and renders that thrill of all created life which R. L. Stevenson claims as the highest

achievement of art. Artists of all kinds would experience this the more keenly from the sight and contact of real things than from representations of the past, even when conjured up with consummate skill and genius; and thus with all artists, specially with descriptive writers, it is by their rendering of the things which they have really seen and felt that their work lives; though they may give a certain vitality to imaginary scenes by the power of a penetrating and sympathetic temperament.

And thus, later on, when the force of the Pre-Raphaelite movement had spent itself, George Mason readjusted the relations of the inward vision to the outward symbol by turning to the agricultural and rural life of man. He painted him in seedtime and in harvest, in the evening sunshine and under the rising moon, praising God in the glowing light, and in these natural subjects he caught the classic attitude of natural grace and muscular strength, so that he could combine the ideal with the real and find his inspiration at last in everyday life. He is the Wordsworth of painting, recognising man's place in Nature and her influence on man.

Fred. Walker and F. Pinwell, doomed to as short an art career as Mason's, followed in his steps; but as their temperaments differed, so necessarily did their art expression.

Walker's love of expressive form led him some-

times astray after effective pose, and the ploughman in his wonderful "Plough" with its splendid light, suggests the studio mannikin; but this affectation of action in his figures became gradually less and less obvious, and, there can be no doubt, would have in time developed into fine achievement.

F. Pinwell's power of seizing the characteristic is marvellous, but he did not seem able to visualise his landscapes with the same insight: they are not as poetic, and, as it were, so responsive to the human interests of the picture as are those of Mason and Walker.

With all these artists the power of the physical eye was intensified by their mental vision. True realists, they were also true idealists, discerning the elements of the Greek statue under the corduroy and smock, the significance of the human face lined and wrinkled by suffering and want; the woman's grace under the cotton frock; so seizing the highest development of which the human form is capable, uniting, too, classicism and romanticism in one bond of grace. Nor do they shrink from the seeming ugly when it is not trivial, but characteristic and symbolic, suggestive of the hard law of destiny, the sorrow of the life of man.

The secret of the difference in their work is chiefly that of temperament. Burne-Jones' genius had been stimulated by that magnificent ancient

literature on which he nourished his art, and by power of his imagination he painted Grecian men and women, the angels of God, the knights and ladies of mediæval times whom he saw with his mind's eye, his genius being very spiritual and deeply interested in the symbolic aspects of life. The others, with an endowment of less fine and subtle quality, perhaps, too, less rare, though even then very rare, give "touches of things common till they rise to touch spheres" and they reveal to duller eyes the beauties which underlie the ordinary objects of life, teaching us like Moses "to espy even in a bush a burning Deity."

And these different powers and methods of visualising, the one evoking mental images of the past, or the non-existent; the other working more obviously from models and seemingly ordinary things, rendering their inner significance and distinction, may be traced through all the works of genius. It is futile to inquire which the higher or more valuable; the first appeals more to the few and excites enthusiasm rather than popularity; it is rarely understood by the general, who erroneously believe that in these cases all models are dispensed with and the artist works entirely by fancy, never realising that the imagination, as well as the intellect, must have stuff to work on. And, moreover, unless the genius which draws its inspiration more emphatically from the mental image is of the

highest order and exceptional power, its works do not make a deep or permanent impress, and die more quickly than the others which are inspired by the daily aspects of life and nature.

This is specially true of descriptive prose writers, even of so popular a writer as Sir Walter Scott. Already his jousts and tournaments, all that pomp of mediævalism and chivalry which he drew with the great power of his vigorous fancy, and which delighted his contemporaries, bored and wearied by the unrelieved commonplace and monotony of their lives, is becoming mere weariness of the flesh to the general reader of to-day, but his description of that beautiful and adventurous Scotland which really thrilled him, which he really saw, is as fresh and glowing as ever.

It would seem, too, that however the artist may produce figures and scenes for himself and his admirers, his imagination must have had these in the preliminary instance suggested to him, by the tangible objects of the outside world which are reflected on his mind, transmuted, transformed, and given back in a glorified form as art through some medium over which genius itself has to acquire the mastery with infinite toil and many disappointments.


Naturally, like all imaginative powers, this of seeing visions, is more vivid and spontaneous in youth, in older years it acts chiefly as recording memory, and artists even of the highest order

often have recourse to stimulants to revive its flagging energies, chiefly opium in its many different forms, or more recently to chloral. Some cases are too well known for comment, but their number is startling.

Even the robust Sir Walter Scott cannot be excepted. In one of his letters in *Lockhart's Letters* he speaks of the combined use and effects of colocynt and laudanum; the passage, a remarkably droll one, is too Rabelaisian to quote, but assuredly no mere occasional indulger would or could have used such language and known so much of the effects of the drug.

Indeed, the effects of opium are so remarkable in inducing mental imagery that one is tempted to the conjecture that the economically civilised heathen Chinese may be able to dispense with a cumbrous and voluminous library, having the power to evoke as many novels as he cares for, from his little bag of opium and his pipe. According to Charles Dickens, speaking through the experience of Jasper Drood, it is possible for the opium smoker, by fixing his attention on a subject from the first, to decide the central idea of his vision and to induce its orderly sequence.

But however the mental vision may be caused, whether by the promptings of that genius of whose working we understand so little, save that it must be in a fair environment if it is to attain its full development, or by a powerful memory



retaining and remoulding the impressions once made on the mind, or by the action of some potent drug or alcohol, which has a mysterious and subtle influence on the brain, one thing, and one thing only, is certain about it. It cannot truly be called creative, except in the limited sense of combining and reconstructing, giving new aspects of familiar things, bringing them from darkness into light, animating them with fresh life. Even in the highest flights of poetic imagination, the seemingly new being is but a new arrangement of previously existing parts, already familiar to us in the natural world.

And everywhere, into whatever region we penetrate, man as creator is anticipated: in his greatest achievements of art and science he is but a slow, fumbling discoverer, surrounded by infinite forces and powers of which he knows as yet little or nothing. Even the notes of the musical scale pre-exist in certain little recognised forms of Nature, in pendent stalactites, and in mechanical construction, too, it would seem that man cannot claim absolute originality; for a tiny little worm, thousands of years ago at the bottom of the ocean's bed, invented the anchor, and not only that, but connected it to its body by an ingenious apparatus almost identical with a comparatively recent invention of man, considered on his part an achievement of mechanical genius.

Man's mission at its highest seems but that of

Darwin's earth-worms: and just as they keep the crust of the earth from hardening, and triturate it so that it shall be fit for seeds and fruits in due season, so it would seem that man is the worm through whose mind the world of appearances, of thought, of theory has ever to pass, that dead masses of clogging prejudices and conventionalities and sterile convictions may be ever broken up, and the mental world kept ever capable of life.

And thus it is that originality is so rare, the great ideas which are supposed to have struck men of genius at the same time, so that quarrels as to exact priority of invention have raged furiously, are simply due to the fact that two out of numberless worms have worked in the same way on similar bits of material. The only wonder is that such things do not happen oftener, for man is enclosed in a double world, physical and spiritual, whose actual boundaries he can neither enlarge nor overpass.

But though his pride may suffer by this discovery, he may console himself with the thought that it suggests, viz., that his mind and the prophetic soul of the wide world dreaming on things to come, must be after all one. That in his wildest visualising there may be some shadow of a truth or reality, the distortion of the reflection being caused by some flaw in the individual mind rather than by disorder in the outward

world ; while in his grandest achievements of art and poetry he is not producing mere baseless and fanciful imaginings, but is rather, consciously or unconsciously, working after some great type, as yet faintly perceived and understood, but which must be more fully revealed as man more and more realises the connection between the outward and visible sign and the inward and invisible grace, and brings them into closer harmony.



**MEN'S WOMEN AND WOMEN'S WOMEN
IN MODERN NOVELS**



II

MEN'S WOMEN AND WOMEN'S WOMEN IN MODERN NOVELS

WE hear so much boasting of our wonderful progress in knowledge that we evidently do not realise how much more wonderful is our ignorance, specially our ignorance of that human nature to which we belong and which surrounds us on every side. It is a marvellous thought that with all our self-love and self-consciousness, our ceaseless preoccupation and interest in ourselves and others, that we can never penetrate fully into our own motives of conduct, still less into those of others ; we cannot even be sure how we should act in circumstances which should be new to us, though of course we always believe we should behave admirably.

And if we know so little about ourselves, we know still less about our neighbours, or indeed about those who live under the same roof with us and with whom we have passed many years of

closest intercourse, who share the same memories, have suffered from the same losses, and rejoiced at the same gladnesses. The cause probably is that self, either one's own or another's, is by no means so simple as it seems, and is, moreover, shadowed by a mysterious and impalpable double, a kind of ideal self, whom we thoroughly believe in, who often seems to us more real than our corporeal selves, but who is hidden from our dearest friends. And to complicate matters, these friends have also their ideals not only of themselves, but of us; we believe we are judging others when we are only imputing ourselves, and the imaginary beings of our minds stand between the truth and the actual persons.

Thus in many ways do we err and stumble, rarely gaining any true and first-hand knowledge of human nature, and to add to our difficulties men have their standards of behaviour and attractiveness not only for themselves, but also for women; and women have theirs not only for themselves, but also for men; and the two are singularly dissimilar.

This is easily to be discovered from novels, where men and women sometimes consciously, sometimes unconsciously, betray their preferences and admirations, and a comparison between the women whom men admire and adore, and the women whom women believe men admire and adore, or ought to adore, and the woman's ideal

man and the man's ideal man yields interesting and amusing results.

Of all novelists Balzac has given us the most vital studies of human nature ; since the days of Shakespeare no other genius has so suppressed himself. Thoroughly absorbed in the interests of his work, he has no fixed convictions or theories to distort his judgments ; he does not use his characters as mere mouthpieces to enforce his own views, nor does he pose as his own hero, giving a glorified view of himself in a union of impossible virtues and powers.

Never for one moment does he lose sight of the masterful interest of character ; his backgrounds of descriptions or discussion, though rich with vivid touches, keen observation, or wise with enlightened perception, are yet always backgrounds, and not, as in some recent novels, the most important and highly wrought part of his work. To such a man, woman naturally is his principal and most congenial subject, and his attitude towards her is perfectly frank ; he neither preaches at her, nor moralises about her, but takes her as he finds her, and he finds her everywhere, in virtuous homes and haunts of vice, in aristocratic and humble society, in penury and wealth, in town and country.

Still even so impartial an artist must needs have some preferences, and most evidently Balzac's are for the charming, and for that special genus of

the charming woman who reserves all her gifts and endowments for man. It is difficult to give a precise analysis of this charm which he values so highly; it is more easy to say what it is not, than what it is. It is not beauty, indeed it rather excludes it in its highest manifestations, as too impressive for the subtle allurements of the charming. Yet it is more than mere prettiness, or rather it is prettiness heightened by that distinction which Balzac regards as the *cachet* of an interesting woman, without which she is a mere homespun, commonplace being. And this charm is not limited to physical endowment, it is chiefly a mental attribute, a power of penetrating into the motives and desires of others, a delicate tact heightened by wit.

Possessed of this magic glamour, this successful desire to please, and Balzac demonstrates the completeness of woman's ascendancy over man; even virtue in this case becomes secondary, how secondary Balzac proves in his masterly study of Valérie, a creature without even the rudiments of morality, a deficiency he explains and excuses in the illegitimate daughter of a dashing soldier of fortune and an actress.

But besides this lack of acknowledged morality, Valérie has not one of those qualities which women flatter themselves make them shine with so alluring a light in the eyes of men. She is greedy, mercenary, untruthful and even incapable

of real love ; scornful of her own sex, to whom ; however (when they are unattractive), she shows a haughty good-nature, and she does not in the least regret her want of virtue, despising that attribute as a weakness, or a stupidity which would impede her success. Yet with all these vices Balzac makes her fascinating, amusing and exhilarating like champagne, and with a prestige that soon brings four lovers to her feet.

It is a masterly and convincing picture, so convincing that even the reader is won over at last, and ceases to wonder that the wicked little woman should have such complete sway over these men. She has them all under her thumb at once, and it is by her power over these different lovers that Balzac proves to us how irresistible she could make herself.

They are no unknown ordinary fast men whom Valérie rules, indeed her vanity and craving for distinction and pre-eminence would have never let her ambitions be satisfied by mere mediocrity. They are all remarkable in some way : Hulot for his beauty and social prestige, the vulgar Crevel for his great wealth, the rich Brazilian for his passionate devotion, and Alexis for his artistic talents. And so great is Valérie's empire over these different temperaments, that all are ready to sacrifice reputation and honour for her sake ; the two unmarried men are only waiting for the death of her dissolute and diseased husband to

marry her, and the two married ones are not driven to her from uncongenial homes, for Madame Hulot, though no longer young, is a beautiful and devoted wife, while Alexis is only recently married to a young and lovely girl.

It is an appalling description of the degradation caused by passion and vanity, but it is drawn with such masterly skill and penetrating insight that it all seems natural and inevitable. Valérie is so amusing, so resolute to assert and maintain her supremacy; she acknowledges men to be the givers of wealth and power, on whom the luxuries she so prizes, nay her very livelihood, depend, therefore she studies all their tastes and weaknesses, and plays on them as a connoisseur in music on some favourite instrument.

By flattery, cajolery, and fun she persuades the elderly beau Hulot to give up his stays and dyes, though consequently his increasing age and corpulence become more conspicuous; she wheedles large sums out of the rich but mean Crevel; coaxes a *chef-d'œuvre* out of Alexis; and persuades the jealous Brazilian, for a time at least, that he is the only one she loves. There is an extraordinarily vivid scene between her and Crevel, when she mocks and humbugs him out of his generous intentions towards poor Madame Hulot, and scoffs at virtue in the most audacious manner, caressing the old sensualist so piquantly that he becomes as wax between her moulding fingers.

Perhaps some part of her strange power may lie in her naturalness ; she is wholly free from any hypocrisy, is frankly wicked, believing (and with justification) that wickedness is a power in the world when judiciously used. She has none of that morgue and sanctity by which many virtuous women contrive to make their good qualities repellent to man, and it might be well if good women would condescend to take a leaf out of the large book of Valérie's experience.

Balzac himself feels this : he seems himself to be enamoured of the being he has described, and breaks out in eager questioning : " Ah, where is the one woman who shall wholly satisfy a man ? " Evidently in his estimate she must have the charm and studied allurements of the *demi-mondaine*, as well as the good qualities of the virtuous. She must hide her austere virtue as carefully as other women do their vice, under a veil of charm and refined voluptuousness. She must be cheerful, witty, alert with repartee, responsive to fun ; her cheerfulness must never flag ; whatever may be the undercurrent of her sufferings and feelings, to man she must ever show her sunny side to charm his melancholy, to allure his admiration. While loving one faithfully she must be ever ready to win the admiration of all, to pique him lest he grow indifferent, to enhance the lustre of his possession.

She must always be well dressed (Balzac's

favourite women always are; he gloats over details of their toilettes, giving them a singular significance which redeems them from triviality), and her good temper, good health, good spirits must never fail.

She should be full of social ambitions in which she succeeds chiefly by the exercise of her tact and wit, and, under all this, she must be a thoroughly good housekeeper, able to administer such funds as may be allowed her so skilfully as to secure the maximum of style with the minimum of expenditure. It is noteworthy that even the depraved Valérie attends to her household duties herself, and never allows herself to sink into slovenliness and indifference before any one of her admirers.

And when this ideal creature is found, Balzac evidently thinks she must live for man and man alone, without any aspirations after her own individual existence; it is a grand confession of virile egoism, all the more impressive from its *naïf* unconsciousness.

Valérie is at the other end of the pole to all that a woman would have described as attractive to men, no woman indeed would have ventured on such a sketch; women, specially good women, shrink from divorcing merit and success, and when they are bold enough to depict a wicked woman, make her either gnawed with remorse, or unsuccessful, or repentant, and constantly regret-

ting her lost innocence and virtue. A woman too would have given her bad woman at least the excuse, if not the justification, of love, passionate, but deceived, so that her wickedness would have been the result of perverted affection and not a strong natural appetite, of which she was no whit ashamed.

Balzac knew better, he knew Valérie triumphed in her power and hated and despised the women she injured so cruelly, but this, too, was a flattering concession to man's supremacy, and it must be recognised that it is not Valérie's viciousness which allures him, but her fascination and *esprit*.

In sharp contrast with this experienced and unscrupulous creature is Madame Rabourdin (*Les Employés*), the beautiful, highly educated wife of a high-minded husband. From his treatment of her, however, one is driven to suspect that Balzac preferred the alluring woman, for he certainly makes her the most triumphantly successful, excepting indeed in her lurid end, and this seems to me rather a concession to that conventional justice, which demands if so wicked a woman is triumphant in life, she should have an early and terrible death, than any expression of Balzac's own convictions. Indeed, the close of Valérie's history shows certain signs of that fatigue and faulty construction, which sometimes mark Balzac's finales; his characters are so living to

him that he cannot always make the conventional ending, so generally exacted from novelists in his day, vice adequately and suitably punished, and virtue rewarded, fit on to the palpitating reality which has so keenly interested him.

We know nothing, however, of Madame Rabourdin's final destiny; hand in hand with her husband she fares out of the story, baffled, disappointed, outwitted, though in this case Rabourdin has been no accomplice in her humiliation; there is even a hint that the two find consolation in the mutual discoveries and trust brought about by their mutual pain. Still Madame Rabourdin is evidently no favourite, for, in spite of her good qualities and rare acquirements, Balzac gives her a hard fate. Impatient at what she believes the indifference of her high-minded husband, resolute to advance interests which she wrongly fancies he neglects, she courts a man of despicable character, but of great influence, to secure his promotion, and at the moment of seeming victory, the place for which she has schemed so meanly, and for which her husband has worked so nobly, goes to a fifth-rate clerk, whose vulgar, ignorant wife has intrigued for him by buying the support of the dominant clerical party, and by threatening to blackmail Madame Rabourdin's supporter.

She, with all her cleverness and knowledge, never suspects the craft and power of the vulgar

plain woman whom she quite overlooks, and Balzac delicately intimates that her intellectual superiority and knowledge blind her to those lower forces and intrigues of society, which high-minded people generally ignore, but to which nevertheless they often have to succumb, and which cannot be conquered by lofty disdain, spotless character, or book knowledge.

So far as I can remember Madame Rabourdin is the only woman whom Balzac endows with knowledge; she knows Latin, if not Greek, and one is driven to the conclusion that he was indifferent to and probably averse to woman's higher education and aspirations after knowledge, though none the less is he alive to the paramount influence which she exercises on the fortune of the man with whom she is connected; in *Père Goriot* he makes Rastignac recognise with cynical frankness that his fortunes depend greatly on his choice of a mistress, and on the good-will and power of women in society.

Differing both from Valérie and Madame Rabourdin, is Madame Hulot, the devoted wife, ever grateful to her husband for her youthful happiness and for the marriage which raised her from her humble position, clinging to him through all his degradation, ever seeking him and receiving him back again even after his crime and the knowledge of the insults and injuries he has heaped on her. And yet when she is old, she

loses all her power and has to submit to most cruel humiliations, her self-sacrifice of no avail against her husband's persistent vice.

Then Balzac, assuming that attitude of critic and spectator towards the creatures of his imagination, which shows how deeply they impressed him, moralises over her unavailing and betrayed love, and questions fate why so fine a character, so devoted a woman, should suffer so appallingly ; and man-like, he hands over the redress of her injuries, the reward of her struggle, to another world and to God. It never seems to strike him that the poor creature's anguish was not sent by God at all, but was caused by man's unbridled sensuality, and that the strength of beings like Valérie lies in the weakness and vanity of Hulot, Crevel and Cie.

Just as Balzac's women show his penetration and sympathetic insight, so his men are essentially virile, not pre-eminently distinguished from women by lofty and disinterested ambitions, or by excess of strength, bodily or physical. They are human rather than heroic, subtle mixtures of good and evil impulses, weakness and passion, keen in their enjoyments, bitter in their despair. They are constantly swayed by the small pomps and vanities of the world, the flesh, and the devil, influenced even by the details of a woman's toilette (feeling all the trouble she takes about her dress is for them), swayed by small greedy motives

and ignoble desires, condescending to mean tricks to gain their ends, but redeemed from triviality and commonplace by the overshadowing presence of a destiny which ever hangs over them, and from whose mighty shadows the bourgeois figures of César Birotteau, Père Goriot, Le Cousin Pons, loom tragic. Their doom springs from the intensity of their outraged and betrayed affections, or from their fatal confiding simplicity, and weak ambitions which give them over a prey to the crafty and unscrupulous. Naturally such men do not care for learned, bookish women, they long for something loving and admiring, for intercourse with a being touched like themselves with a keen passion for the present.

Characters like these, built on the elemental passions, show little of Time's ageing power, except perhaps that generally speaking the attitude of Balzac's man towards woman is marked by a slight touch of condescension as to a being of a lower sphere, a lord of creation pose, which is now somewhat *démodé*, at least as far as regards outward expression.

In the modest and restricted limits of the English novel, intended chiefly for the domestic circle and rarely overpassing its boundaries, except in avowed stories of adventures, such a mordant, terrible study as that of Valérie could never be attempted. The nearest approach we get is Becky Sharp; but though the creation of Becky

may perhaps have been suggested by a study of Balzac and his methods, she is not only necessarily differently treated to Valérie, but she is altogether a different person.

Thackeray himself protests against her, and constantly reminds his readers that he really does not approve of this so fascinating little sharper. He uses her to point a moral and adorn a tale, which she does most effectively, but he does his best to excuse her, speculates irresolutely as to whether she was, after all, so scandalously wicked, and finally exiles her into vulgar surroundings, which a Parisienne like Valérie could never have tolerated. She has a touch of northern *ennui* and disenchantment in her temperament, and when shut out from grand society, and indeed, while still in it, perceives its hollowness in a way Valérie never would have done. She has occasional remorse and hankerings after respectability, which, however, she is able successfully to resist, and she is in some ways far more of a mere sharper and adventuress than the fastidious Parisienne. She has, moreover, a bourgeois scorn of careful housekeeping as uncongenial to her aspirations for fine ladyism, and so gets involved in debts which nullify her previous grasping, dishonest seizure of money.

Thackeray was too much hampered by English love of respectability to leave Becky with the honours of victory, but he was too great an artist

to make her the heroine of a tract, so he limits her punishment to prosperous dulness, a fine end. She is, therefore, on the whole, more socially successful than Valérie, who accepts her position without struggle and makes no effort, after that one party at the Hulots', to obtain an entrance into society, whereas Becky clings to the legend of her respectability and aims at, and in a measure obtains, high social success. The cause of this lies chiefly in the husbands, the French one accepting his dishonour with cynical indifference, while Rawdon Crawley, however scampish himself, implicitly believes in his wife's spotless virtue, an effective, touching, but improbable attitude in a man of the world who had seen so much of women, and knew something of Becky's antecedents.

Thackeray, like Balzac, seems the victim of his own syren, for, in spite of his protests, it is evident that Becky is studied *con amore*; she is infinitely more dominant and vivid than Amelia, oppressively domestic and submissive, a sop thrown to the British matron, who is so shocked by any lapses from morality in novels, or Art. In short, Becky is a man's woman, alert, practical, charming, while Amelia is a woman's woman, devoted, self-sacrificing, unenterprising.

Thackeray ever has these two types of women, the one sentimental, loving, all goodness and devotion, the other the attractive little worldling,

who intrigues, flirts, and amuses, and it seems that though his moral judgment feels bound to emphasise the good qualities of the one, he is really most interested in the little rake, who makes other women seem dull. He loves wit in women, just a dash of masculine *esprit* in the charming frail creatures, who are so dependent on man for protection and happiness, only it must not go too far and lead them to think for themselves, for curiously, he seems to associate brilliance and originality in women with wickedness, perhaps because it excludes excess of feeling and sentiment.

Like Balzac, Thackeray esteems woman's claims to higher education very lightly, and has some rather cheap jokes about her inaccurate scholarship, one, of which he is evidently fond, being to attribute Dante's second name to the fact that he came from Algiers. The two great novelists both think that a light outfit of accomplishments for the *agrémens* of Society, and just sufficient knowledge to save from stupidity, are all a woman needs, and their ideals of womanhood coincide in many points.

Dickens' women hardly deserve notice. With his democratic notions he limits himself chiefly to the purely domestic woman, or else to grotesque ones with some intense dominating characteristic, or feeble sillies like Mrs. Nickleby. His pattern women, for one cannot call them ideal, are some-

what sickly-sentimental, given to self-disparagement, self-sacrifice, and dependence on man. He gives no types—in short, he does not treat his women, except those of the lower class as Mrs. Gamp, with any masterly power of sympathetic imagination or analysis.

We get a fresh and different type of woman in Sir Walter Scott, one really deserving the name of heroine, for *Di Vernon* marks the rise of the modern, if not of the new woman in literature, and is the first of a long series of healthy, breezy heroines, culminating the other day in *Carinthia* of *The Amazing Marriage*.

Diana rises from Sir Walter's pages, fresh and delightful, independent, courageous, witty: she neither trots about with a bundle of keys and a work-basket, nor does she devote herself to dress, and society, and flirtations, more or less scandalous. Instead of this, she interests herself in the important affairs which occupy her men folk; helpful and energetic, she strikes a new note, not only for literature but for life, breaking down old conventionalities and prejudices, and suggesting the possibility of a woman who can not only take care of herself, but who can help men.

How original such a character was when it first appeared may be seen by comparing Diana with the women in Miss Austen's novels. The lady-like girls who flutter through her pages are essentially a woman's women, and delightful specimens

of their kind, redeemed from dulness not by sensational adventures, but by the charming, satirical humour with which they are described.

Eleanor Dashwood is my favourite, and may, I think, fairly claim to be an ideal whom both men and women can appreciate, alert, sincere, witty, and unselfish, yet without morbid self-sacrifice. Her chief characteristic is, however, her admirable common sense; common sense is evidently the highest virtue in Miss Austen's eyes, and she makes Eleanor remark, "Lucy does not want sense, and that is the foundation on which everything good may be built."

Miss Austen's favourite women—I beg their pardon, ladies—unlike Balzac's, Thackeray's, and Dickens', love culture, and both Eleanor Dashwood and Anne Eliot are great readers of good books, such as Cowper, who was seemingly their Tennyson. They are accomplished, playing the piano, and even talking learnedly on chiaroscuro, but all in a gentle ladylike way; the moment they overpass the boundaries of moderation, even in pursuit of knowledge, they are turned into pitiless fun as Mary Bennett in *Pride and Prejudice*.

Their accomplishments too are entirely for the drawing-room and domestic circle, for these fastidious ladies would have shrunk even from the publicity of the village concert. To them to be conspicuous is to be vulgar; they desire

neither fame nor glory, and instead of aspiring to personally gained independence like the young ladies of the modern novel, regard the position of governess as degradation and slavery, except in the rare cases of Jane Fairfax and Mrs. Weston; in the unfinished *Watsons* a hint is given of the misery the authoress intended to inflict on her heroine through the cruel fate which compelled her to gain her own bread.

Evidently Miss Austen considered marriage as the natural and only end and aim of all women, and the household as the one sphere of her activities, though in *Emma* Wodehouse she shows some symptoms of recognising the incoming of the new spirit of philanthropy, as *Emma* is always arranging her friends' affairs in the most altruistic spirit, with disastrous results, and it is difficult to discover whether the smile with which Miss Austen seems to regard her is one of sympathy or mockery.

It is, however, in no dull home that Miss Austen places her women, but in one constantly enlivened with fun and music, and as much dancing as possible, genteel amusements well suited to county families. Her heroines are, in short, good prayer-book women, content with that station of life to which they are called, and Miss Austen always prefers that that station shall be a good one.

Naturally, her men are on the same plane as

her women, for so consummate an artist would never tolerate any disproportion in her work ; her ideal of manhood is therefore simple and natural—a good husband, a kindly father, such as we feel sure Edward Ferrers would prove, despite his youthful folly, straightforward, with plenty, indeed superabundance, of Miss Austen's favourite virtue, common sense, and without any temptation to serious self-sacrifice or strenuous living. All Miss Austen's men are of this type without spiritual insight or spiritual struggle ; they are of the earth, earthy, but they are not vicious, and when she has to speak of disagreeable subjects, as in the case of Willoughby, she does it with unfaltering tact, with a simple recognition of men's ways, and an expression of the perception that women are as bad.

Jane Austen's remarkable genius enabled her to give free and permanent expression to the aspirations of the women of her day, and evidently those aspirations were of a limited nature : to be well off, well placed, well married, above all, to be ladies ; these were the highest distinctions of the woman of the pre-Victorian period and for long afterwards. Naturally in novels of a lower class, these aspirations still find expression, though less strikingly described ; there was no seeking for models in the gutter or off the street.

The heroines of these once popular stories were almost invariably of high rank, with proud

parents (it was a hall mark of distinction to be proud) ; they were of surpassing beauty and unlimited accomplishments. Their dress, specially for the evenings, was frequently pink satin and pearls, and I have known one heroine elope in this airy attire on a winter's evening without bad results. These heroines, by the by, were much given to eloping ; it was the simple plot of the period, the first unconventionality by which woman was able to show a rebellious spirit, and protest against authority. This aristocratic heroine was also much given to fainting on the slightest provocation and at the most inconvenient moments, apparently to give the hero the chance of showing his marvellous strength ; it was an ordinary feat for him to carry her lovely but unconscious form long distances, and immediately after to do a considerable amount of fighting on her behalf.


He, too, was of high social position, and was either a flawless knight or a wicked brute who broke the heroine's heart, and served as a background for her spotless virtues ; he was ever, as Barrie would say, a "magerful man." Indeed, the hero best loved of women novelists was the dashing scamp who had all the greater vices and none of the lesser ones, who could ruin a girl with *débonnaire* grace and then take his friends' faults on him, and die, sooner than set things straight for himself. It never seemed to strike the

originators and admirers of this wonderful being that the greater sins contain the lesser, and that there is generally no more ill-natured, spiteful being in the world than the man who indulges in ignoble vice, and "imputes himself."

Besides these stock characters there was the long procession of neurotic heroines, the delight of certain novelists, ambitious for opportunities to display their genius for psychological analysis. At their head is Frou Frou, exotic, languid, turning from the wholesome commonplace of every day to gain a morbid distinction, yearning for the unattainable, unappeased and unappeasable.

Into this unreal company of conventional attributes, or exceptional existences, there entered at last a demure little figure, with a plain face, an orphan of no special birth and very poor, educated by charity for a governess, obliged thus to gain her daily bread, yet destined to work a revolution among the characterless nonentities which crowded the ordinary novel.

In *Jane Eyre* we get a very changed ideal of womanhood to any of Miss Austen's or any previous novelists, one, despite appearances, essentially feminine, though showing that a marked change was passing over the aspirations of women and their perceptions of life and literature. Resolute and independent, she conquers fate, not by power of beauty or favour of fortune, but by force



of will and passion of feeling. Before her the submissive, sentimental woman fades away and never fully recovers her supremacy as first lady of the plot. Her place is now taken by a being who yearns to break the yoke of bondage and ignorance. And this haunting desire for experience and knowledge still finds expression in many of the novels by women; they refuse the ordinary aspects of life and hanker after some great vague excitement and danger, as though these contained some subtle essence of delight which they miss in the orderly and tranquil sequence of a well organised and refined life.

After *Jane Eyre*, a return to the old simple-living, ignorant domestic heroine, or to the scheming, needy intriguer was impossible, the new type had to be accepted and improved; and though George Eliot's heroines differ widely from the comparatively simply drawn maidens of Charlotte Brontë, they yet show many symptoms of the same unrest and discontent. They are no longer satisfied with the ordinary life of woman, with its household duties and limited conditions, they yearn for something above and beyond the everyday existence of average humanity. They are large of stature, with classical beauty, and are swayed by religious emotions, or ardent intellectual desires. There is therefore something unreal about her ideal woman as portrayed by Romola, who has so little of the warm passions

of humanity that she moves through the pages of the story like some Greek statue, mysteriously endowed with movement, one can hardly call it life, there is so little beat of the human heart in her.

Dorothea, though with more life and humanity, is of the same type, and I have always a sense of something incongruous in her, possibly because so much is said of her beauty. A woman "whose simple doom is to be beautiful," is much less likely to fret at the more complicated and sad fate of her brothers and sisters, than one whose plainness quickens her sympathies with the deficiencies of others. Moreover, when George Eliot is describing these stately heroines she constantly alludes to their fairness, as though conscious she was not impressing it on the reader by the effect produced by the heroine herself, a method which betrays either a defective model or bad drawing.

The somewhat grandiose style too in which George Eliot draws her chief female characters makes them out of proportion to the men, for though she endows these with certain masculine attributes, &c., they yet fall short of the true heroic standard, chiefly through falling victims to the wiles and blandishments of the frivolous, charming woman.

For George Eliot, like Thackeray, has her two types of womanhood, in her case the grand and beautiful, and the pretty and designing or

frivolous, and even she succumbs to the charms of the fascinating, and paints her Hettys, Rosamunds, and Tesses in tender colours, showing here the masculine nature of her genius, appreciating and rejoicing in the charm of the charming woman, though her feminine side protests against the injustice thus done to the good and plain.

After George Eliot's books the great-souled woman reappears in other novels, her last development being Marcella, a union of somewhat impossible attributes, a woman whose generous impulses lead her into much mischief, and who seems strangely incongruous in a society of intrigue and corruption, half cynical, half strenuously political, where her enthusiasms would afford food for mockery rather than admiration. She would have shone better on a quieter background, but at the best one wonders how a woman even of Marcella's energy could succeed in taking such sweeping views of society, and crowd into one short day such varied experiences and sympathies; her powers of living first in the slums and then in all the glories of the highest aristocratic and exclusive society are mythical rather than convincing.

It would seem as though Mrs. Ward had aimed at giving a grand picture of the one woman endowed to meet all the demands of her husband, and also the claims of modern society

with its very complex requirements. And the result is a fine-hearted woman stumbling into pitfalls, and increasing, rather than lightening, the weary load of public life for her husband.

Indeed, Marcella suggests the question whether it would make for married happiness that the wife should master her husband's work and concern herself so fully with it. It would be a depressing future if all wives expected to discuss their husbands' work with them instead of amusing them and interesting them in other things.

It is all the more singular that Mrs. Ward should have exaggerated this principal character, as her minor characters (like George Eliot's) are drawn with a genius which gives them remarkable vitality, and are full of a humour which seems, unluckily, sometimes suppressed in the interests of a high purpose.


Marcella, despite her democratic and political sympathies, moves among the poor as a being of another sphere, trying to share their joys and sorrows, and deeply pitying conditions of their lot which they themselves have ceased to feel, and which do not appear to them exceptional. Mrs. Ward seizes this finely, and the group of peasants, for instance, in *Marcella*, who are bored and overwhelmed with her penitent sympathy, specially the old peasant, who has lived her life naturally and still relishes it keenly, and the

East-enders in *Sir G. Tressidy*, who boast at the meeting of their sufferings, markedly the woman who has gone through the dreadful operation, are full of life and truth. And as picturesque characters, local dialects, and attractive oddities of country life seem destined to disappear under the levelling process of a general education, it is much to be thankful for when an able novelist seizes the dying-out types, and preserves them for those of our successors who will not have the chance of seeing and hearing the originals.

With George Meredith we get again a different standard of womanly attainments, and his women are interesting not only in themselves but as showing also a certain change in the attitude of men towards them. He is interested in them as is Balzac, but he has less of the lord of creation in his attitude towards them; he recognises as fully as the French novelist that they often hold the destiny of man in their hands, as is notably the case in *The Amazing Marriage*, where the young lord, highly born, immensely rich, and unhampered by any close family ties, seems as much the master of his fate as it is possible for a mortal to be, a point of view constantly impressed on him by his many parasites, whom he treats with more than royal insolence. And then the irony of fate works out in his life, and he bows to his destiny like any ordinary mortal, only making it the harder by his frantic struggles.

Carinthia is his Nemesis, a woman who disdains finesse and intrigue and falseness as much as he does himself; and who, acting under the impulse of her love for her brother, secures his powerful rival in a very singular and downright manner, a tragic comic incident such as George Meredith delights in. Carinthia is in other respects the opposite of her fantastic husband, for she takes life gravely and calmly, full of life and love is she, but desiring to express her devotion by helpful service, to rise to the height of masculine courage and not to lower man by acting Delilah to his strength. She therefore behaves in a straightforward confiding manner, which proves infinitely more embarrassing than any scheming, and her character and courage develop under the pressure of pain and danger. She neither scolds nor strikes a tragic attitude at her husband's brutal behaviour; she is consoled and stayed by her love for her child, and only under the dread of separation from him does her composure give way and pass into exaggerated and excited terror.

Yet with all her bravery and grand simplicity her conduct to her husband is in direct contrast to Madame Hulot's self-sacrificing devotion; she respects herself as well as her husband, she makes no further appeal to him after the iron has entered her soul, but when he desires to re-establish the natural relations between man



and wife, he is met with a dignified refusal which he believes final.

She is divided by a wide deep chasm of knowledge and experience from the women whose charm and very *raison d'être* is a supplement and submissive addition to the life of man. The pressure of life has told on her exegesis, man has at length discovered that though women may be the absorbing passion of his existence, there is as well as love, money, ambition, and a hundred other interests to divert his attention and tax his strength. Consequently his ideal of woman changes with his own enlarged view of life; he no longer requires a mere toy, a nerveless exacting being, who cannot stand upright without his arm, who is full of whims and fancies, whose behaviour cannot be counted on from day to day. Neither does he turn to the intriguing adventuress to relieve the dull monotony of his domestic life. His ideal woman is now one of the Venus of Mèlos type—healthy, vigorous, natural yet self-controlled, who can share his fatigues and anxieties and march step by step with him through the varied paths of life.


Therefore he expresses his wishes by creating an ideal like Carinthia, who has been brought up in the mountains and is a Wordsworthian woman. Her loyalty, her artless devotion, her intense friendship for her sick friend, her strong feelings of motherhood are kept in due proportion, and

her chief fault is her lack of humour, a rather frequent failing among women, and her moments of obtuseness when her respect and affection for her father lead her into blundering confidences, are essentially feminine.

Again in *Diana of the Crossways* the ambitions of men are thwarted or at least threatened by a woman's indiscretion, and like Balzac, George Meredith recognises the shaping influence of woman on man's career. He is, however, unlike Balzac in his estimate of woman's intellect; the heroine of *The Egoist*, the daughter of a scholar, is acquainted with the dead tongues, while Carinthia has an equipment of modern ones, but he draws the line at the woman who writes, pitying but not admiring her, and making her delicate—his crime among women.

He seizes with sympathetic insight the woman's instinctive yielding to impulse, and he makes her generous and capable of friendship with her fellow women, a point rarely granted by masculine authors, who seem generally to think a certain cattishness towards other women an essential note of the feminine character.

But the most conspicuous innovation in his novels is women's attitude towards their husbands; they are no longer wholly subordinate to them, suppressing their own lives in obedience to the marital will, they are not indeed clamorous or vituperative under their wrongs, but they are



no Griseldas, and would have despised a woman who took so much kicking and insult so patiently. They perceive that meekness and submission, beyond a certain point, to married unhappiness, only means pandering to vicious or tyrannical whims, therefore both Carinthia and Araminta leave their husbands with the approval of their author, a significant sign of social change of thought.

It is significant, too, that when George Meredith wishes to confer happiness on one of his favourites, he does not marry her to a hero with lofty aims and uncomfortable aspirations, but to some man past his first youth, sometimes a widower, always with sober views of life, and a strong desire for simple pleasures, a man who has learned by bitter experience that a healthy, vigorous woman would be the most likely to give him permanent peace and content, and the pair settle down in the country, avoiding London with its hurrying rush, its paltry ambitions and restless intrigues.

It is sometimes suggested that art and literature are prophetic, the soul of the wide world dreaming of things to come, and that certain ideas are first set forth by them, which later on are developed in actual life; if this be so then the growth of women into strong and independent beings is assured, for there is an increasing tendency in novels to assimilate the woman to the


man mentally, physically, and morally, or even immorally.

It is a tendency of wide-reaching consequences and emphasises the note of modernity, which seems to throw the few novels which still live from their artistic merits into a remote prehistoric period. It is, for instance, a very far cry from the *Watsons*, with "I had rather see you dead than a governess," to *Villette*, with Lucy Snow proud of her profession, seeing its vast importance, and prouder still of her independence and powers of self-support and self-control.

It would, however, be rash to infer from the increase of strong and independent women in literature that the inept and inefficient are dying out in actual life; the process must be very gradual, and it is accompanied by some reactionary and serious symptoms.

There are, for instance, some signs that men may, for a time at least, have reached the limit of their profound interest in women and are recognising other forces as of paramount interest in life; a discovery which enables them to dispense with a heroine altogether.

R. L. Stevenson, for example, makes short work of his female characters, generally ignoring them except in *David Balfour*, though the assertion he did not understand women and therefore could not describe them, is disposed of by the masterly sketch of a girl in *Weir of Hermiston*.



Then in that modern invention, the novel with a purpose, the purpose often becomes hero and heroine, as in Huysmans' *En Route*, where the dominant interest centres in the troubles and struggles of a sceptic in search of religion, and all the author's descriptive powers are given up to the portrayal of the religious services with which he strives to influence this man's emotions. Love, pleasure, family life, the duties of citizenship, sink into insignificance before the awful wrestle with spiritual problems. In reality Durtal's spiritual egoisms are as great as the physical selfishness of Balzac's Beau Hulo; but his feverish thirst for the solace of religious conviction is given with a sincerity which deeply affects the reader, though it is impossible not to feel that, after all, he is but seeking an experience which shall last, and appease his fastidious discontent, after trying all other sensations which have ended in disgust and reaction.

Nor is this a solitary instance; in many avowedly love stories other interests dominate, and we feel it is as important that the picture or book should succeed as that the marriage should take place. Often, too, the hero and heroine are used as puppets, mere mouthpieces to enforce the author's views of things in general and religion in particular; and if this use of the novel for the enforcement of principles continues, there seems every chance of its losing its in-

terest, and becoming a mere picturesque essay or sermon.

Another significant sign of the tendency to transform the modern novel from a form of literature intended chiefly for amusement and charm, is shown in many stories, which begin now where the older novels left off, viz., at marriage. This is conspicuously the case with the Russian novelists, especially with Tolstoi; but their work would demand a special and separate paper even for inadequate treatment, so varied are the themes, so original and powerful their treatment.

And these phenomena are not only reflected more or less accurately in novels, but they are intensified in some measure by them, for whether readers are conscious of it or not their minds are influenced by what they read. This is pre-eminently the case with women, and two of the greatest French novelists have recognised this and made it a pivot in the construction of their plots. Balzac and Flaubert both have heroines leading the dull lives of provincial bourgeois, and the shock which awakes them to a tragic consciousness of the emptiness of their lives is reading *Paul and Virginia*.

It seems an innocent romance now, but its latent poison was its dominant sentimentality, and its representing the practical business of life as wholly secondary and unimportant compared

to the delights of love and love-making. It is therefore the last kind of mental nourishment for girls not fully occupied by interesting work, but dreaming of conquest, and with that strange ignorance of life and its conditions and of human nature, which makes it seemingly imperative that each one of us should buy our own experience by irreparable mistakes which have to be atoned for by all that makes for the happiness of life.

It is, however, the extreme dulness of the women's lives which makes the influence of romances so powerful on their imagination, and we cannot but conclude that our great-grandmothers and grandmothers were nerved to endure lives of homely toil and privation which would be quite insupportable to their descendants. Madame Bovary *mère* was quite right in attributing Emma's sufferings and discontent to her novel reading and lack of manual work, only one feels thankful the obvious remedy was never tried, or we should have lost a masterly though most painful novel.

The way in which Emma's latent longings for luxury and distinction are stimulated first by novel reading, then by one grand ball, which gives her a sudden insight into the joys and enjoyments of wealth and position, the development of depravity from what seems at first such natural and harmless desires, the horror of the catastrophe are most impressive, and leave one with a sense of a terrible judgment.

None the less striking is the dividing chasm between the stupid husband and the keen-witted, luxurious, *désœuvrée* woman ; it emphasises the unwholesome division between the two sexes, which seems to be getting wider under the present conditions of their upbringing, division of labour, and the attraction which higher education is exerting on women.

Emma has all the greedy, exacting egoism of a sentimentalist ; she exaggerates the importance of her emotions ; they are of absorbing interest to her, and she mistakes her instincts for luxury and elegance, for exalted passion and refined aspirations, and yet it is impossible not to feel a pity and even a sympathy for her which Valérie never excites. The dulness of her surroundings is so utterly depressing. How was it, one is tempted to ask, that so many generations of women seem never to have discovered that the weary curse of dulness was stamped on their existences ?

Women have found it out now, and are striving to exorcise the demon in many and various ways. Novel writing is one of them, and forms a fair safety-valve for suppressed emotion, to the alarm of the masculine mind ; for many men seem to think the morbid, unwholesome, neurotic woman of some recent fiction will actually replace the healthier type of woman with normal instincts and wholesome sense of duty.

There is, I think, little ground for the alarm.

These morbid beings are exceptional, the primary passions of the heart will ever retain their supremacy, ever, after a period of artificiality, will art and literature return to the fundamental motives of life. And the restlessness of the western woman is not an isolated factor, self-created from mere idleness and discontent. It is part and parcel of the great religious movement, which is ever going on, and which began centuries ago with the transition from ancestor-worship to the more enlightened perceptions of religious duty.

The shock which displaced man from his undisputed supremacy not only as head, but as priest of the household, the change which brought the excluded woman and girl into the sphere of religious life acted at first slowly and gradually, but it produced ceaseless vibrations, which have affected all thought ever since, even in forms at first seemingly so utterly remote as novels, a form of art which catches and reflects, often with singular vividness, the practical issue of changing convictions.

None the less would it be most disastrous for men and women to get their views of life and human nature chiefly from novels; they would have as unreal ones as though they judged the human form entirely through pictures. And the novelist, like the artist, is hampered in many ways: there are views of life which it is thought necessary to hide from the young, prejudices to

be tenderly dealt with, conventionalities to be respected.

Naturally the last novel mentioned, *Madame Bovary*, suggests the much-vexed question of the "young person," for whose sake so many unreal novels have been written and a whole library of bad books, in a literary sense, with a good purpose, called into being. But it is noteworthy that the novel which Flaubert and Balzac accredit with such powers of mischief (*Paul et Virginie*) was not one which contains any of that frank outspokenness which is supposed to be so specially pernicious to the young and innocent, indeed its heroine is the victim of her excessive modesty. The objection therefore must be, that the novel often gives false views of life, which mislead just as much when they exaggerate on the side of over-refinement as of coarseness; indeed the first mischief may be the more insidious.

This is eminently the case with women. Many of them get their ideas of life not first hand, but from novels, and if they read only those with an avowedly good purpose, from which all allusions to the bad passions of men and women are scrupulously excluded, they start life with false ideas, crude notions, and too often with a conviction that goodness is rewarded with excellent marriages and all the good things of life. There is the curse of gentility on all these books; they show signs of that feebleness and exaggeration which divides

true genius from mere writing; but ignorant young girls are impressed by the descriptions they give of life, which coincide with their own preconceived notions, and thus they remain blind to the significance of much that happens round them, and refuse to draw their own deductions from evils which they interpret with constant references to some favourite story, while they model themselves on some favourite heroine.

Girls brought up in well-regulated families, with innocent pleasures, are wholly ignorant of the important part the bad passions play in the drama of life and success. They refuse to recognise the mysterious intermixture of evil with good which can never be disentangled on earth; they know nothing or only guess vaguely at the different standard of morality and love in men and women, and they have a most confiding belief that all that is wanted for right conduct in life is an appeal to the higher emotions of humanity, which are ever latent and only need a gentle touch to bring them into action.


I do not believe it is possible for men with their different upbringing to realise the extreme innocence and ignorance of many girls of the middle class; like Mariana, in *Pericles*, they are unconscious of their surroundings or of the vileness of many of those with whom they are brought in contact.

This sweet ignorance is lovely, and need not be

disturbed if the girls could only remain always young and sheltered, or pass their lives in a fool's paradise without any tempting serpent or accusing Adam ; but this is impossible. They must take their parts in many trying posts which need much judgment and knowledge, not of books but of human nature ; for Balzac was right when he made Madame Rabourdin unconscious of the intrigues round her ; a dying out or obscuring of the keen perception of evil forces seem often to accompany the higher education of women, and thus they fall an easy prey to the greedy and unscrupulous, who flatter them to their faces and intrigue against and villify them in secret.

It seems therefore a mistake to maim the novel in the interests of those who might be best enlightened by it, and not to give a true or at least an adequate representation of life ; there would be no need even then to go to the gutter for models, for the extreme vice caused by hopeless poverty and long inherited degeneration of character is as abnormal and misleading as the virtues of the saintly creatures who are filled with remorse at the slightest transgression.

It is, too, curious that we should be so very shocked by the representation in literature of much that we accept resignedly in life ; it would be a step in progress if we could reverse the process and purify literature by purifying life. Literature, if it is to be of any value, must be



fully representative, and it cannot be this if evil is firmly excluded ; but neither is it adequate if the enjoyments of vice are given without the Nemesis which is its inevitable shadow. So there is need after all for the much abused moral, only it must be developed naturally out of the action itself and not be a preachment tacked on from outside.

If, then, girls are so influenced by novels, it would be right that as far as possible they should receive from them true and clear views of life. And the truth is that the young person will be less influenced by the incidents which are related than by the spirit and style of the narration. Once, after a long course of Balzac, I took up an English novel of avowedly innocent tendencies, and was startled by the ardour with which the kissing and wooing were described. Balzac had had nothing so suggestive, though he treats openly of many appalling aspects of humanity, which women "who wink and shut their apprehension up from common sense of what men were and are, and would not know what men must be," remain wilfully ignorant of.


The picture need not be made too repulsive, for a great writer treats of life with the impartiality of an artist, keeps the emotions in due proportion, and thus can speak of much which becomes displeasing in an avowedly moralistic novelist who enlarges on vice in the interest of virtue. It is this which makes many goody-goody novels such

baleful reading for girls, and also their representation or rather misrepresentation of man, mere mannikin figures stuck into sentimental attitudes.

Our great-grandmothers, who had little time for reading and comparatively few novels, must have got their knowledge of humanity chiefly first hand through gossip, and though this doubtless led to much ill nature and scandal, it had its advantages. Those who indulged in it must often have proved that truth is stranger than fiction, and that the study of the motives, desires, and aspirations of actual beings was quite as exciting and interesting as that of the dried and literary specimens in books.

This method, too, had another advantage, by giving little opening for foolish idealising and sentimentality which leads to delusion, which leads to exaggerated expectations, which leads to misery and sometimes to despair. It is a false refinement to shut our eyes to painful truths about life and ourselves, and weakens, instead of strengthens, our powers of fighting against evil.

However, all this is getting to be an old story, and there is some fear now of reaction on the other side and a belief that the mere portrayal of evil shows the strength and experience of genius, but by and by the equilibrium will be established. In the meanwhile before the ever-reaching, never-ending influence of destroying and recreating religious thought, and the scientific developments



which mark modern life, our dear old familiar friends—the womanly heroine and the masculine hero—are doomed, doomed to as fossilised an extinction as the mastodon. We need not regret them, they were unreal rather than ideal.

As to what will be the result of the modern ideal of healthy, vigorous women, as depicted in novels, it is difficult and would be rash to make any definite forecast, for it is easy to overestimate the representative power of works of fiction. Carinthia and her fellows may be a passing fancy rather than a permanent type, but even so they will make their mark and do their good.

I once heard the distinguished wife of a distinguished man discoursing earnestly, as was ever her wont, on the prevalence of heroines in modern novels, as contrasted with the paucity of heroes. In her grand heroic way she declared that at last by this we should get the true hero, for the influence of the women must tell on the men. (It was about the time of the publication of *Middlemarch*, and high-souled women were very prevalent—in novels.)

Her distinguished husband grew restive at last and remarked almost brutally, "Women cannot write about men, they don't know how they live."

I felt inclined to retort, "You speak only of happy women," but something stayed my tongue, an embarrassed silence fell on us, and the arrogant, indiscreet little speech evidently rankled. Then

the distinguished woman abruptly dismounted from that favourite hobby of hers, the superiority of women, and talked about the weather and flowers; her husband made affable little jokes suited to feminine comprehension of wit, and I wondered which of them was right, and whether after all there might not be something in the woman's theory.

THE NUDE IN MODERN ART

III

THE NUDE IN MODERN ART

WHEN very clever people make a very positive assertion it needs courage to differ from them, specially when such dissent is sure to entail a scoffing charge of Philistinism. Nevertheless, I am going to be bold and to question that last emphatic cry of the greatly artistic, that the unclothed human form is the highest and most beautiful subject for art representation. I do not, however, hold a brief for Mrs. Grundy; I cannot think that the naked is necessarily the indecent, but I doubt the underlying truth of the proposition, at least so far, as modern art is concerned.

Of course I shall have the Greeks quoted at me: they are declared the final court of appeal in art matters, and they ought to silence me. They do not, even though they are supported by the weighty authority of Lessing, whose opinions I respect more than those of any other man of

letters who may have written on art, not even excepting the mellifluous John Ruskin. The reason for my audacity is that I do not think we have any right to appropriate and give dominant importance to the one practice in Greek art which strikes our fancy, and flourish it as a banner, while we neglect and ignore the methods and modes of life which prompted it.

It is too often assumed that Art must be the last refined, artificial acquirement of highly civilised and highly educated nations, but it is really a universal human instinct; we find some traces of it even among the most primitive peoples. In its full, natural development it is the medium through which man strives, more or less articulately, to give outward expression to that inward desire which is the dominant characteristic of all humanity, viz., its insatiable thirst after, its ceaseless impulse to search for, the typical and beautiful, specially for the beautiful man and woman, or, rather, I should say the beautiful woman and man.


(This craving for the beautiful is so universal, and at the same time so impossible to satisfy under present earthly conditions, that we are driven to the presumption that it indicates a divine origin, which makes man feel exiled from his rightful inheritance, or it points to a goal which he will sometime reach: perhaps both, death being the turning homeward.)

The types expressive of this beauty vary according to nationality;* but the desire for it is ever there, and in the Western world at least there would be general agreement that the Greeks have been most successful in realising it in Art, bequeathing to us glorious embodiments of beauty, human yet with a suggestion of the divine. This result was not accidental nor due entirely to the individual genius of their artists; it was part of the Greek life as a whole, and arose from the practical, penetrating character of the Greek intellect, their appreciation of the concrete and physical. While the Persians and other seekers for the beautiful, specially in the East, strove to realise their dreams and enhance the beauty and impressiveness of the individual by gorgeous surroundings, magnificent jewellery, and splendid attire, the Greeks seized the true inwardness, or rather outwardness of the matter, and aimed at developing the body itself, independent of its clothes.* From their earliest years, their well-anointed youths struggled in the Palestra, where the spectators could watch their grace of limb, their strength of muscle; thus, when the Greek artist wanted a model, he had not far to seek.

* The Greeks believed man was created in the image of God, or rather of the gods; the Persians formulated their conceptions of the Divine under symbols or natural forces, as fire, &c., hence Persian art is line and colour, Greek art, form.

There were numbers in every gymnasium, he might even take the man in the street. Now when the modern artist wants models, he, too, generally has to appeal to the man, or worse still, the woman in the street, and what does he get? An undeveloped, etiolated body, unlovely, limp, unmuscular, showing outward and visible signs of the want of inward grace. Could an ancient Greek behold these specimens of humanity, he would scoff at them, as he scoffed at the white-skinned Persian whom he peeled of his many garments to expose to the derision of his own stalwart son. His mockery would have increased a hundredfold at the mere suggestion of using such creatures as models for the artist to reproduce in permanent materials, as lasting types. Here we get the first and greatest difficulty for the use of the nude in modern art; centuries of clothing have left their indelible mark on the body; we may regret, but it is useless to ignore it.

We have indeed among us men and women, strong, straight, beautiful as God made them, but they are very rare, and it would be most difficult and generally wholly impossible to get one of them to strip and pose for a class of art students; so these have to do their best with men unable, or unwilling, to earn in other ways; and with women brought up in the vice of stays and high heels, and showing painful signs of deterioration. Such models must affect Art perniciously.



Moreover, such is the general tyranny of clothes that we have almost ceased to consider them in their primary relations to warmth and decency, and regard them chiefly as heightening personal attractions or concealing defects, even as beautiful in themselves. As far as woman's dress is concerned, we have at least the justification of an endless range of colour, and infinite variety of delicate tints and shades which are lovely to behold. Not that the Greeks ignored the power of colour; we know they used strong, effective masses of red, blue, yellow on their sculptured pediments; but just as their musical scale must have been limited by the inadequacy of their instruments, so their powers of representing the beautiful through colour must have been narrow, not from lack of nerve sensibility—it was there, though perhaps not fully roused—but because of their limited range of colour media.*

With us, on the contrary, colour has attained supreme importance and significance; it is hardly second to form in its appeal to our pleasures of the eye; we use it as a symbol of emotions, and have appropriate shades for our joys and sorrows, consequently it plays a very conspicuous part in our art, which has eagerly adopted its varying

* "Colours we have never seen," says Socrates, after enumerating the purple of the sea, the white of the snow, the yellow of gold, as some of many tints comprised in the glorious new world to be inherited after death.

charm, its suggestion of light and shade, or of changeful seasons, of summer or spring.

And this leads us to another point of divergence between Grecian and modern art, tending to accentuate the difficulties of the modern use of the nude. The Greeks were sculptors rather than painters; there are, it is true, written records of pictures, but we cannot argue on these.

Naturally this difference of medium would have almost overwhelming influence, as sculpture concerns itself with form, as painting with colour. And though I cannot agree with some who declare sculpture to be a lost art, still in these days it creates much less interest and has fewer votaries than painting. It has lost its importance as decoration since its divorce from architecture, and there seems little prospect of its recovery until its true position is once more recognised; and for these reasons I do not give it the same importance in the discussion as painting.

The difference also of a spirit between a warlike people recognising warfare as a paramount public duty, and a Christianised nation striving after the peaceful virtues, and the increase of knowledge and wealth must tell on Art; the Greek nude is therefore frequently masculine and in vigorous attitudes; the modern generally feminine, sometimes voluptuous. The difference is significant; modern art is essentially picturesque, as opposed to the ancient statuesque, form of art.

But, after all, practice rather than theory must be allowed decisive weight in the inquiry. Are our highest and most prized art possessions, Greek, Italian, or modern, those of wholly nude figures? Has the art instinct of the greatest painters and sculptors of genius led them to discard drapery and colour in their noblest rendering of the human form, specially of women? It hardly seems so. Compare the so-called Venus of Mélos with the Medician Venus (a statue about whose pedigree I cannot but feel doubts); which is the finer in its appeal to art instincts? The one with the drapery (though not clothing) or the wholly undraped? Assuredly the former. .

Indeed, the examples of entirely nude women seem rarer even in Greek sculpture than is generally assumed. The Greek sculptor probably felt that the lines and curves of drapery enhanced the loveliness of women's form, their quite nude figures are mostly those of men in attitudes of struggle and effort which show the play of muscle and give an impression of strength. Attention is centred on the action, and the absence of accessories passes unheeded.

Then let us take Raphael's Madonnas; considering them only as radiant, beautiful women, apart from religious sentiment, how much they gain by the soft blue drapery which in no way disfigures their form, and does not detract from

the suggestion of strength. Obviously, too, unless the nude figure be the only one in the picture, it offers peculiar difficulties and pitfalls in the *motif* and composition of the group.

The examples of the nude in Italian art, before the Renaissance, show how completely the natural, unconscious influences which inspired Greek art were lost. As the Italian painters could not have recourse to the gymnasium, they strove to solve the problem of adequate reason for the nude by stripping their subjects for the tortures and martyrdoms of saints, brutal incidents, unfit for art representation, specially as the victims were necessarily emaciated and passive. Doubtless the prompting motive was originally religious rather than artistic; but the Italians were, after all, too true artists wholly to ignore the pictorial value of the naked human form, even though their rendering of it was crude and ascetic. The result was, of course, painful and incongruous.

The wasted form of St. Sebastian stuck full of arrows, even when treated with the reverent genius which distinguishes the Francia in the Church of Ste. Stefano, Bologna, appeals to our pity and admiration for his patient endurance rather than to that æsthetic delight in the beauty of the human form which is appeased only by the natural and healthy; his nakedness emphasises

the degradation of his punishment and excites feelings of pain and almost of repulsion.*

Compare this passive, resigned figure, and that of others in similar pictures, with the frantic but heroic struggles of the priest in the Laocoon group, and we seem brought face to face with a new element in man's experience, viz., his recognition of and resignation to inevitable suffering even when unjustly inflicted. This unresisting acceptance of pain as an integral part of his earthly destiny, this acquiescent despair, may help to heighten man's moral consciousness, but its influence on his art is most injurious; for the art world, being an ideal one, ought not to find a place for the merely morbid, nor should artists pander to that brutal enjoyment of, and gloating on, the infliction of pain which too often accompanies a highly artificial civilisation, and which probably is a reaction from enforced refinement and conventionalities.

Among modern pictures there are two which illustrate my meaning well, and give colour its true value in modern art. They are both by masters, both beautiful, and both treat the same subject, the one with the figure nude, the other with it draped. It is interesting to compare and

* In contrast was a fine but small picture of the nude by Cesare da Sesto, exhibited at a recent exhibition (1898) at the Burlington Fine Arts Club, "St John the Baptist in the desert."

contrast them and discuss which is the more effective. They are two Circes: the one, by the Hon. J. Collier, gives us a naked Circe sitting in a wood, her animals wallowing before her. She is painted in the grand academic style of which Mr. Collier can be often a fine exemplar, the drawing masterly, the flesh-tints admirable, the painting solid. Moreover, Mrs. Grundy herself could hardly be deeply shocked, Circe sits back to the spectator, and the soft, lovely curves of her body recall the beautiful outlines of a Greek statue.

The other Circe, Sir E. Burne-Jones's, is draped from neck to feet in vivid yellow garments which fall in wonderful folds, expressive of swift, sudden action, as she bends forward with eager malignity to mix the subtle potion for the Greeks, whose many-oared galley is seen in the near distance, while animals with wistful, longing eyes purr, cat-like, round her feet. Now this dominant yellow seems strangely to intensify the impression of the witch's wickedness and is more powerful for this effect than nakedness, which, after all, implies a certain innocence in its wearer. We feel Circe must always have worn this, or flame-colour; pink, green, blue, would be incongruous: it is an evil colour, and while Mr. Collier gives us a beautiful woman in a summer wood who seems to have dispensed with clothing because of the heat and because she was alone,

Sir Edward, more deeply imaginative, chiefly from the use of colour and drapery, gives us the very Circe, delighting in the exercise of those powerful, vicious allurements which turned men into beasts; and his Circe too is beautiful.

Then let us take two pictures by Sir Edward with nude figures. One was shown at the Grosvenor Gallery at the same time as the "Laus Veneris"; a naiad creeping from a stream and wonderingly greeted by a fawn on the banks, a very lovely picture with a certain conventionalised art treatment of flesh tints, but so strangely pathetic in both attitude and expression of the two figures, as to verge on the depressing. The other picture was a landscape, mediæval style, with a solitary wood faun seated under the trees. He was just sufficiently dehumanised and Puck-like not to have regretted his lack of clothing, but he seemed to do so; there was no *naïf* gladness or rejoicing in him, rather a sad wonder. He too was strangely pathetic, and looked so forlorn and exiled as to bring to one's mind Wordsworth's longing to be freed from the Christianising, civilising influences through which he felt he had lost full sympathy with and power of understanding and being at one with Nature.

And here we probably get the key to the puzzle; for good or evil, the strange divorce between man and Nature is now so marked and

decisive that Art finds it increasingly difficult, indeed impossible, either to ignore or bridge it.

We feel it more emphatically than ever whenever she gives us that human nakedness which is a lost birthright; we are less impressed by the beauty of the form than startled by the inevitable associations of cold and suffering, we miss the reconciling charm of colour, and long for the half revelations of drapery, concealing yet emphasizing.

Let us face the truth; man is no longer wholly satisfied with external appearances, even in art; he must have something below and beyond. He questions, doubts, and is swayed by numberless associations and inherited memories which have become part of himself, welded into his very nature. His art therefore is influenced by many complex emotions and conditions, for true art must be ever the sincere expression of man's feelings, convictions, and aspirations. It no longer reflects a simple faith which embodies the powers of Nature, its gods and goddesses in beautiful human forms. It is no longer largely and simply decorative, the outcome of public duty and of religious faith, the possession of the people; it has sunk and dwindled into household ornament, the luxury and private property of the rich, and glories in dainty accessories, elaborate backgrounds, and even in passing fashions.

Greek art was for the Republic, mediæval for the Church, modern art is for the rich purchaser, whose taste, or want of it, must be considered. Plainly, the nude would be hopelessly out of place in the *genre* pictures and representations of home life which are our most numerous and popular art productions, and which are generally pervaded by that fatal sentimentality, and by appeals to those easily excited emotions which delight and soothe the prosperous and wealthy.

The art intended for the drawing-room must differ from that which was to beautify the public hall or the Church, and merely to revive ancient methods of art will be but futile, while our modes of life and thought are so essentially different.


The dominant influence, too, of Literature has told on our art; we want a story in our pictures now, an appeal to our feelings or to our poetic memories, or to that sense of humour which has become second nature to many. Besides form and colour, we hanker after a suggestion of love or laughter, we relish the intellectual stimulant of the historic picture with its revival of the past glories of pageantry and splendid apparel, its rendering of some deed of patriotic prowess. Above all, we must have expressive faces, indicative of thought and emotion, and an expressive face with a naked body is a ridiculous anomaly. Our minds are so full of memories and

associations that we cannot free ourselves from their accumulated force ; they control our judgments, and help to direct our verdicts even in art matters, not truly in their scope, though we rarely pause to analyse their workings, and are hardly conscious of their power.

All this is fatal to classicism and simple nakedness, an impression of the unnaturalness of the nude is given by the backgrounds of detail and colour which have become habitual and seemingly necessary to our art, and this and the great difficulty of finding suitable models are almost insuperable objections to its representation.

The full force of these objections was demonstrated in Calderon's "Saint Elizabeth," a finely painted picture full of knowledge and technique of the highest kind, but otherwise pretty much all that a picture of the nude should not be, the nude figure being emaciated and angular, in an elaborate setting. This *chétif* appearance may typify the saint's austerities, but a Christian ascetic is no more a fit subject for representation than an unhealthy patient, and a painful sense of indecency is added by the presence of the sanctimonious spectators of her humiliation, clothed in their religious habits, with the draped and crowned figure of the crucifix in front of the saint.

It would seem that the modern painter of the nude should choose one of two courses : either to



place his figure in such artificial surroundings as shall give an impression of unreality or allegory, or to take him or her to primitive lands, to sea, or river.

One of Herr Makart's pictures gives a fine example of the first method, a superlatively magnificent room in a palace; in a corner two beautiful women, splendidly attired, playing chess; in front a marble bath from which the bather has just stepped; she pauses to point out a move to the players; on a couch farther off, a nude figure surrounded by fluttering little loves and graces. A fine light flooded the picture; despite its artificialness there was nothing paltry, but a grandeur of colour and sweep of line which somewhat overawed criticism, notwithstanding doubts as to the firmness of the drawing.

The allegorical or embodiment of the powers of Nature is another refuge for the painter of the nude, strikingly used by Ingres in his "Source," a river nymph with urn. But this method does not give much scope to the imagination, and is soon played out, degenerating into the absurdly artificial, as when one of Ingres' imitators painted a frozen source, where the poor necessary nymph sat sleeping on ice among icicles, under the lurid red of a winter sunset, in a hard frost. She showed, however, no signs of discomfort or suffering, but was stout, rosy, and well favoured,

ridiculous effects suggestive of a pantomime scene.

On the whole, the best method for the resolute painter of the nude is to turn to primitive lands, where constant uninterrupted habit still enables man to be naked and not ashamed, and where Darwin himself owns a civilised man would look at a disadvantage, blanced and effeminate, by the side of the strong, graceful, bronze savage, with his decoration of tattoo; only I think we might dispense with the tattooing, as the beginning or germ of extraneous ornament, sure to end in bangles, earrings, and ornamental clothing.

Evidently the matter is not so simple as it seems at first, and however beautiful we think the human form, merely to paint a naked man or woman is not to free art from the trammels of the Philistine and to give us a grand picture. Much more is needed, the setting must be considered as well as the gem, and just as the beauty of a fine cameo may be enhanced by a plain band of gold, or vulgarised by an elaborate frame which distracts the eye, so the effect of a finely painted nude figure may be marred by an unsuitable background suggestive of the ordinary conditions of everyday life, with its numberless accessories and its resolute artificiality.

Moreover, the pose of the model needs the most careful study, it cannot be too simple and natural; there must be a total absence of coyness or arch-

ness, and it is imperative that there should not be even a hint of any feeling of shame, or consciousness of the presence of spectators, attitudes of mind and body very difficult to obtain from the ordinary professional model. It may be urged that the artist should see the model through an idealising imagination, which can surround him or her with a halo of necessary artistic beauty, but it cannot be disputed that working from imperfect, badly developed models must interfere with and distort that mental or visualised image which it is the artist's highest achievement to reproduce.

If we would have a noble human art, we must, as Goethe says, begin at the beginning and develop the beauty of the body, before we aspire to recreate it in art. This is specially the case with women, whose clothing at present disguises and often distorts their form.* If they would gain the full measure of that beauty to which they all aspire, they must not only claim freedom from superfluous articles of clothing, or such as inter-

* It is remarkable that the Turks and Chinese, the most emphatic about the subordination of women, even among Eastern peoples, should yet allow them the dual garment so shocking to the Western mind. I have seen it stated that the Chinese women of the poorer classes, who do not distort their feet, are wonderfully vigorous and strong despite poor nourishment. This was attributed chiefly to their form of dress, which for untold generations has not interfered with the functions of digestion or circulation.

fere with healthy growth, and from heavy, unmeaning folds and trimmings, which impede graceful motion, but they should also study and practice Greek gymnastic and wise physical culture. It might, too, be well to revive that anointing and rubbing with oil, which not only beautifies the skin, but preserves and nourishes the tissues, and which would be a far better preventive of deforming rheumatism than quantities of woollen clothing.

Then when we have mastered these first principles of healthy life, and trained our bodies in vigour and strength, the crown of beauty will be added, and man's outward form will conform to his inward aspiration. Beauty will surround him, and he will no longer hanker after the nude in art, and perhaps not after art at all, as we at present understand it, for life is greater even than art itself. It is, at the best, but a protest against ugliness (and the causes which have produced ugliness), a yearning for more beauty, a third term between the actual and the mental image, a strange territory where man strives, more or less successfully, to lose his palpable and find his ideal self. Or to use what may be a more accurate figure, it is a bridge between two worlds, that in which man at present lives, and that which he is ever striving to create; a bridge known and used as yet by few, but in the fulness of time, when it is universally recognised, to be

traversed by all, and when the land of promise is finally reached, men will forget and neglect the road over which they travelled to it.

Doubtless this realisation of the beautiful, this general conformity to a type at present very rare, is as yet very far off. Art is long, and time fleeting, but only the individual life, not the greater life of humanity, which knows not death, but ever flows onward, enlarged by experience and suffering, disciplined by knowledge, its hardest and most disfiguring labour more and more eased by science. Thus by methods many and various, by direct and indirect means, humanity is certain to find that for which it seeks ; and when that which was lost is found it will rejoice greatly, and will put away the mirror on which it has thrown for so many ages pictures and scenes to beguile its love-sick, weary eyes, and which it will no longer want, when surrounded by living beauty ; for, when the real is as great and beautiful as the counterfeit, this, however exquisite, will be no longer needed to appease and console. " For now we see in part, and know in part, but when that which is perfect is come, then that which is in part shall vanish away."

Under these new conditions art must pass into fresh developments ; on the one hand it will cease to be an aspiration and will more and more become a record. It will free itself from its subordinate position as a handmaid to literature

and be less and less a gallery of illustration, while the seemingly ever-increasing tendency of man to live in great towns will stimulate the painting of external Nature as seen by him in his many varying moods, and landscape paintings, and the rendering of remarkable, contemporary historical events, with perhaps portrait painting, will be the limits of pictorial art. In another phase it will again unite itself with those handicrafts it has seemed for a time to despise, and will fulfil that long neglected or forgotten part of its mission, the beautifying the objects of everyday life and use. Thus at last Goethe's prophetic desire will be accomplished :

“CROWN OF LIFE! BE STILL THE USEFUL AND
THE ORNAMENTAL ONE.”

NOTE.

*Suggestions for an Adam and Eve picture, in
two compartments.*

1. Adam and Eve, a boy and girl of the gypsy type, lean and slender. Eve not matronly—not the prospective mother of all nations, as she is so often represented, but very young with the youth of a young world, with face unlined by experience or sorrow. She and Adam are admiring a tiger cub, whose mother is licking it

like a cat; other animals are near, and birds flutter round fearless, friendly.

2. Eve still beautiful, but much older and sadder, is fashioning a garment out of animals' skins by means of large thorns, from a bush close by; her fingers are wounded by the thorns, she is dressed in a robe of skin and wears a necklace of red berries. Adam, who is also in a garment of skins, kneels beside her, flaying a tiger cub with a sharp stone. Cain, with a tiger skin round him, watches, and helps, full of pleasure and excitement. In the background prowl angry beasts who have been robbed of their young, watching to attack, while vultures hover near, waiting for carrion. It is the discord between man and Nature caused by man's ever-growing needs.



CHICKWEED



IV

CHICKWEED

BOTH last summer and this florists and flower women have sold large quantities of a small white flower, which has been much in request with all who love beauty and grace in their floral arrangements. Yet it is not at all a striking-looking flower, and has none of the points which go to make a floral reputation ; it has not, either collectively or individually, loveliness of form, or beauty of colouring, or sweetness of scent. It has a long weedy stalk with many joints, from each of which springs a subsidiary stem, which branches out into numerous slender stalklets with a terminal bud or little insignificant white star-shaped floweret.

The woman from whom I buy dignifies it with the title of "Asparergrass," partly because she's strangely ignorant about her own wares, partly she feels she can charge more with this misnomer than if she called it by its true name of chickweed. For the flower is of the tribe of stitch-

worts, smaller than the stellaria of our hedges, but larger and more erect than the common trailing weed of our gardens. It must be grown with little or no cultivation, and must thus be singularly profitable, as shown by the fact that instead of being gathered it is plucked up by the roots, and that a threepenny bunch is more than enough for two large vases.

No one, however, would dream of putting such an ineffective plant into vases by itself, but place it among more conspicuous and distinguished flowers, and its true value is suddenly revealed. It flutters its slight stalks and its little starry florets over them with exquisite grace and lightness; it veils and harmonises too vivid colours; it adds fresh beauty to the beautiful, and lends grace to the stiff. It is, indeed, the virtue of the humble chickweed that it is not out of place with the most costly flowers, but adds, what I must call, a style to all of them. And then it is so kindly, it emphasises their good and hides their weak points without their knowing it.

This, then, is the mission of this suddenly prized insignificant weed, not to be beautiful itself, but to heighten the beauty of more cultivated flowers; and though it seems heartless to weight so slight a flower with a moral, the temptation is irresistible. It gives such striking testimony to the value of the homely and the simple—testimony to be much prized in these

days of show off, and pretentious seeking for the new effective.

For even art, to be truly art, and not merely an elaborate and artificial representation, must be rooted in the everyday life of humanity; divorced from this, it becomes mere luxury, a distinction of the rich. And I have high authority for this seemingly Philistine statement none other than that of William Morris, of æsthetic memory.

He was lecturing on Art in Birmingham to an audience ardently desirous for practical art guidance. He had been asked, he said, to tell us what each one of us might do for art, and he was about to comply with this wish. And we all turned such eager faces full on him, that he laughed outright, no doubt guessing our excited anticipation either of some weighty epigrammatic utterance, or some hint which would enable us to beautify our drawing-rooms in a new and highly original manner.

His instruction, however, was a cold shower-bath to such enthusiasms. We were, he said, in the first place to be neat; specially we were never to leave papers fluttering about when we had been enjoying ourselves out of doors; it was a slovenly and most inartistic habit. If able to build, we were, whenever possible, to respect any tree growing on our site, and never to cut one down if we could possibly help it; finally we were to consume our own smoke.

These were the first lessons of art education ; as to furnishing we were to get rid of all superfluities which were troublesome to dust, and had no effect in a room, except to suggest how rich the owner must be, how tired the housemaid, who had to keep everything clean.

Not one word about pictures we might paint, or colours we might harmonise ; it was the A B C of art with a vengeance. We went away crestfallen, as befitted students of the Art School of the town where distinguished artists were born, though few had received their art training there, and I laughed and pondered, and as I pondered I learnt.

Perhaps, spite of tall talk and ambitious aspirations, respect for orderliness might be as prompting an impulse to art as wild, feverish outbreaks of irresponsible genius. The old masters certainly did not yearn over much for elaborate gorgeousness ; they cherished simplicity more, and through it they reached those *naïf* effects which give their works that charm of perpetual youth, to be attained only by that sincere, unconscious genius which is recognised even by the general, who remain unsensitive and untouched by more subtle and studied efforts. Raphael's Madonnas, for instance, must appeal to all who have the universal instinct of motherhood, the general admiration of childhood, and thus they are appreciated as well by the poor and ignorant as by the rich

and cultivated—appreciated, of course, in a very different way, and without connoisseurship, but still with a loving and true admiration.

It has long been noticed that a work of the highest art, whether in the plastic arts or music, is enjoyed by the ignorant, when noble and excellent work of a rather lower calibre, with less genius, but more study, soon wearies them. I have sometimes heard very advanced Liberals attribute this to the superior intellect with which they resolutely, generously, but quite unreasonably accredit the working man; but it has always seemed to me that the true solution is, that the greater work of Art, the more it contains homely touches, which heighten its beauties and find a response in humble hearts.

For Maeterlinck was not the first original discoverer of "the treasure of the humble"; its riches have been known to all great artists since the days of Homer, since the age of the Bible. In short, ever since the mind of man was first stirred to note the many aspects of life—its all embracing comprehensiveness, its union of opposites, its cruel irony, and tender love, and to grasp that variety in unity, which Art must seize, if it is to be the vibrating responsive medium for man's feelings and passions and aspirations. And the greater and truer the work of Art, the more will it have something for every one.

And this great tolerance or catholicity of Art

explains, perhaps, why there are many comparatively illiterate lovers of Shakespear who can understand his rendering of the great elemental passions of humanity, which appeal to their emotions, but who could be dreadfully bored by the other Elizabethan dramatists, even by Marlowe's mighty line, Ben Jonson's wonderful learning, or Ford's gloomy but elaborate beauty. These do not appeal to them, but they recognise the native wood notes wild, and love their sweetness, though they cannot apprise their genius.

Moreover, none knew better than Shakespear the right use of chickweed, the value of some simple character or homely phrase to relieve the tension of feeling, to touch the less complex emotions, to heighten, without rant, the intensity of the tragic. The introduction of the clowns or fools in the somewhat stately plays is an obvious instance of this, and it is in his grandest tragedy that he uses them with the keenest insight and boldness. Lear without the fool would be intolerable in its awful gloom, and so great is the relief of his wise, sympathetic foolery, that we follow his fortunes with beating hearts, and I cannot understand how a certain distinguished writer could have brought such an accusation against the construction of Lear as this: "The fool drops out of the play without our being told what becomes of him." How can he have missed, "And my poor fool is hanged," in which in his

own intensity of anguish the king remembers and mourns his faithful follower?

Again in that awful scene of death, when young and old, innocent and guilty are swept into the vortex of an appalling doom, who but a great genius would have dared to make the stricken tragic king cry out, "Undo this button"?


A lesser poet would instead have described convulsions and anguish, but would never have given us the deep impression of choking despair we get from these simple words. And two more instances of this sublime use of the homely I must give—Othello's great and bitter cry when Emilia reveals Iago's treachery, and he throws himself on the bed; and David's "Oh, my son Absalom, my son, my son Absalom!". One feels instinctively that no elaborate expression of grief could ever touch the heart as do these simple exclamations; they seem to keep the anguish they express fresh and natural for ages.

And it is thus with all great work: a play or novel, with only distinguished people, only clever sayings, misses much of its effect; for this brilliant crowd shines with such a level light, that we cannot perceive the stars for it; we need the relief of ordinary people to enable us to discern its distinction. In the same way a conversation all wit strikes us less for its *esprit* than for its laboured effort, and we long for a little soothing

stupidity to rest our tired nerves, and to give some touch of the natural.

Even the great Wagner, that apostle of the rare and precious, does not wholly scorn the simple, and uses it delightfully in the *Meistersingers*, as a contrast to pedantry and the production of poetry by scientific rules. And when Water von der Vogelweide stands in the square of Nuremberg, singing his artless songs, I always wish the scene would reproduce as fitting background Vischer's lovely fountain of the countryman with the goose under his arm, a quaint subject made living and delightful by the genius which it is treated—a genius equally in touch with mailed kings and heroic conquerors.

The instances in works of fiction of this value of the homely, as a relief and pleasure, and as a means of preventing the author soaring out of range of natural sympathies and interests, are innumerable. Pierre Loti is one who sometimes gives it the charm of his exquisite style, and in his best work sends a thrill of deep pathos and tragedy through the lives of common fisher folk; glorifying with tender lights and shadows the struggles of Yves with inherited drunkenness, Sylvestre cut off in his vigorous youth in a little Chinese war, and the unknown fate of Yan; while the grandmother, submitting resignedly to the common lot of those who wed the toilers of the sea, is the very personification of domestic tragedy.




In England, or rather Scotland, we have had recently a work of much the same art, when J. M. Barrie let us look through a window in Thrums at a poor uneducated Scotch weaver and his sickly wife, and charmed us to tears and laughter with Jesse's and Libby's company manners, and with the pathetic yet constant tragedy of a prodigal son for whom no fatted calf might be killed.

The book had a success somewhat similar to that of *Cranford*, where Mrs. Gaskell, with as limited means, achieved even a greater triumph, and imitators crowded into the long-neglected field. But they mistook, and fancied the admiration was for the chickweed itself, and not for the flowers of tender emotion and sympathetic humour which it emphasised, and so they used it too freely, and their photograph of the trivial and their cheap effects soon palled. For there is, of course, the patent danger of the *naïf*, dropping into the obvious and commonplace, but not if it is used with effective economy or as a foil, or a contrast. And indeed the simple and natural are the opposites of the commonplace which seizes some living truth, and gives just a touch of exaggeration, or emphasises some obvious and trivial point, or repeats a pleasing effect wearifully and incessantly to the destruction of all life and interest. I remember at a water-colour exhibition two sketches of wallflowers which illustrated this. The one painter had carefully chosen a

bunch of the biggest flowers, with many of the differing shades of which they are capable, had arranged them in a glass vase and conscientiously painted even the stalks as seen through the glass in the water. The other had taken a single specimen, flung it on a little heap of moss and had given the singularly vigorous spring of its stem, the texture of its petals, the loose confirmation of its flowers, its very character, had painted too its mossy background with a dewy freshness. The one treatment was elaborately commonplace, the other simple, but it was the simplicity of insight which seizes the essential and rejects the trivial.

Japanese artists excel in this simplicity; with all its genius, their art springs from artistic appreciation of the homely and ordinary, and nowhere do they show their insight more fully than in the economy with which they treat the general motives of their decorations. If a flower is what the English call common—*i.e.*, a generous flowerer under inexpensive culture—they do not therefore use it extravagantly but treat it as respectfully as an imperial chrysanthemum. They study it under all conditions and aspect, and do not give it in big bunches; even their bulrushes and common grasses receive individual treatment. Moreover, if they sketch a little ordinary bird it is in some attitude of energy and delight, their flowers are free and graceful,



and thus they impart the rare distinction of complete freedom and gladness to everyday objects. And with all this they give too that transitoriness of life which must be the dominant lesson of Nature to the inhabitants of so earth-quaky an island, they represent the bird on the wing, the flower that fadeth with a keen significance and sympathy which enables them to seize the fleeting moment, and transfix its most characteristic expression; their whole art, despite its light grace, carries ever the daintiest hint of mortality, reclaiming it from any reproach of triviality.*

It was a grander, nobler, more impressive simplicity which was the dominant note of Greek art. As Lessing so constantly insists, they did neither too much nor too little. We generally do too much, we rub our point or meaning in, and we make that which should be distinguished commonplace by our stupid treatment. Even now, in these days of boasted progress and artistic culture, we are far from that perfection of everyday life which ought to be our aim, and neglect the lesser graces with persistent indifference. Our girls are taught to dance, and many dance gracefully, to bicycle, which they generally do

* Since writing this, I have seen in the *Westminster Gazette* the account of a lecture given by Mr. S. Kajima on the Japanese art of flower arrangement, the charming religious origin to which he attributes it accounts at once for its special and individual excellence.

well, but how few, if any, learn to walk, and yet how much pleasanter it would be to watch the swift, firm tread and the well-balanced pose than to follow girls who march, trot, saunter, do anything but walk!

Probably much of the resolute seeking for the fine and often the superfine may have been reactionary from the limits, mental and physical, of the highly sensible and stay-at-home eighteenth century. The delight in the foreign, after a period when continental wars and lack of travelling facilities had almost shut us up in our island, the discovery of the brilliancy and complexity of Eastern designs and stuffs which our Indian conquests brought within our reach, led us to overlook and neglect the beauties of the indigenous and homely. But at last we have righted, or are righting, ourselves, though curiously enough the movement which has greatly helped this desired end was long stigmatised as affected, æsthetic, and unwholesome, but its true meaning and significance is being at last fully recognised. And I hope we have now lived through the time when the flowers which grow in cottage plots would be despised and banished from aristocratic gardens, when borders must be filled with blazing geraniums and yellow calceolaria in rigid lines or formal patterns, and the subdued colour of love-in-a-mist, the fine shading of the many-hued Iris or fleur-de-lis, lightly esteemed by

the lovers and cultivators of bedding-out plants and monster roses.

For many years Perdita's true instinct for the natural and for the freedom of flowers seemed hopelessly lost, we were for ever meddling with all creating Nature, correcting her proofs and altering them, till her original intentions and colours could hardly be discerned; we could not even trust our creepers to climb by the use of their own tendrils, but nailed them up, to the destruction of all beauty of festoon.

Worst of all we delighted in an edition de luxe of some simple flower, and exhibited it with a fine conceit in our cleverness, and with no perception that we had grown a monstrosity like the over-fed beasts at cattle shows. Quite lately I have seen roses and begonias which instinctively suggested apoplexy, so full of colour and huge they were, while a short time ago the beauty of a sunflower seemed to be measured only by the yard.

Probably too, this taste, or rather want of taste, for the exaggerated and extravagant was stimulated by the many people who had suddenly acquired riches but not education, and who believed in no beauty or charm that had not the cachet of costliness. For it requires much culture to perceive the exquisiteness of that which has not the distinction of rarity, and it is, I think, only our greatest painter who has truly observed

and earnestly rendered the many fine qualities of the wild rose: the vigorous arched spring of its boughs, the strong jointure and colour of its thorns, the many shades of its flowers from one root, from pure white to pale and rosy pink, the slight divergence of the forms of its leaves.

Generally speaking the railing accusation of the common, the intolerable thirst for the distinguished or the different, is the cry of mediocrity which can see no beauty in the familiar and unexaggerated; for people impute themselves, and attribute the special sight of their own limited or defective vision to some inherent deficiency in the objects they are looking at. Just as in religion it is the self-righteous Jew who is ever ready with the accusation of common and unclean, so it is mostly the ambitious and pretentious who are ever ready with the stigma of common and vulgar.

It needs the artist's eye to discern the full beauty of everyday life, the fine attitude of the mowers and reapers, bending over their work in harmonious line and swaying with rhythmic movement, the tender light under the lime-trees, the flexible yet firm outlines of a girl's figure busy over domestic work. Overlooking these, many picture painters, for they cannot truly be called artists, have gone as far afield after the picturesque as Dr. Syntax, and lost

the near at home, because they have not learnt that—

“ If we could open and intend our eye
We all like Moses should espy,
E'en in a bush, a burning Deity.”

And as in Art, so in life ; we lose by too much striving, by neglecting the humble and obscure ; and I only wish that those who despise the chickweed folk and the chickweed virtues which, with such unconscious grace, bring into relief or veil with kindly tenderness the more conspicuous, might be condemned to nothing but the distinguished for the term of their natural lives.

• THE MUSICAL REMINISCENCES OF
AN UNMUSICAL PERSON •

V

*THE MUSICAL REMINISCENCES OF
AN UNMUSICAL PERSON*

IN this age of retrospection the instinct of comparing the past with the present is irresistible, but it is depressing, as well as cheering, for it ages one painfully to look back at the state in which one remembers the arts, we won't quite say how many years ago, and contrast their former with their present developments. The chasm between them is so wide and deep that one feels as though they were separated by a whole century, instead of considerably less than half a one.

This is specially the case with music; what shocks of disappointment, surprise, and amusement we should feel if we could hear once more some of the music which filled our young ears with delight, and made our hearts throb with emotion; and how ashamed we should be of the criticism of the advanced young person. We should be forced to agree with him that music,

specially concert music, as a fine art for the general, is a new invention, and that in its previous existence it was a mere amusement, intended to tickle the ears of the groundlings and fill up pauses in conversation; and a short account of the general condition of musical culture, both in public and private, as it existed some years ago, may give to the often desponding and exacting young people of to-day an idea of its former decadence, and help to justify those who claim for it, in its present developments, remarkable progress.

But first of all I must define and explain that I use the term music in its fullest and most popular sense, and specially with reference to secular music, considered as an art which ministers to the higher nature of man, and through which he receives not only intellectual pleasures, but also the stimulus to varied emotions. For I have noticed that music as expressive of religious feeling and devotion never wholly sinks below a certain level, and at the period which I am trying to describe, musical festivals devoted to oratorio were well supported even by serious-minded people, who considered music in its lighter aspects, if not actually immoral, yet as tending to the improper; and as certainly encouraging improper people to a public display of their talents.

The first concert which made a deep impression

• THE MUSICAL REMINISCENCES OF
 AN UNMUSICAL PERSON •

singer was obliged in self-defence to reappear and sing again.

The first concert of which I can remember anything definite was given at a certain provincial town, with a considerable musical reputation, based on a triennial festival, organised primarily in the interests of charity rather than of music, and on very popular, cheap concerts given weekly in the Town Hall, where solo pianoforte playing and ballad singing formed the great attractions, varied occasionally by some violin playing, but the violin was not appreciated then as it is now. Besides the solemn music of the festivals and the weekly trivial performances, two or perhaps three miscellaneous concerts, chiefly vocal, were given during the winter. At the one I first remember Sim Reeves' "Pretty Jane" was the great attraction of the evening.

The popular tenor was supported by numerous other artists, the concerts being always arranged to include at least a tenor, a bass, a soprano, and a contralto, each of whom sang first separately, and then they joined in duets and quartets. The programme was accordingly long and varied, and contained songs, ballads, and scraps from favourite operas following each other in rapid succession, and without the slightest sequence. The instrumental music was piano and violin, which the audience evidently tolerated only as giving a period of rest to the singers. If, however, the

programme was lacking in quality, it was liberal of quantity, the concert not being over when we left at half-past eleven. This was in some measure due to the encores which were then insisted on by the public, and generally competed for by the performers as evidences of appreciation.

I remember Mrs. Sims Reeves conjugated every auxiliary verb in the grammar to emphasise her determination not "to buckle to," and Madame Viardot-Garcia, a great artist, though with an unsympathetic voice, gave full play to her dramatic instincts in an operatic trio. As her two coadjutors stood as stolid and motionless as statues, and took no notice of her blandishments and reproaches, the effect was comical. Sims Reeves' voice was very, very lovely in those days; but he then indulged in bad defects of style, as sharp contrasts, a whisper followed by a sudden shout, and his choice of songs on that occasion was most commonplace.

Ah me! I can laugh and criticise now, but how lovely I thought it all then! I was filled with surprise and regret at the emptiness of the great gallery; I expected it would have been crowded for such lovely singing, and certainly the highest price was not prohibitive—only 3s. 6d.

My first orchestral concert was one of Julien's, and then the audience was large enough to satisfy even me.

It consisted chiefly of ladies in full evening toilette, for in those days no one with any pretensions to social position ever went to public entertainments except with bare arms and shoulders, whatever might be the draughts and temperature. They were often serious, as concerts were very rarely given except during the winter months, at least in the provinces. I think country people would have thought it a waste of fine weather to have gone to them in the summer. They were rare treats for winter evenings, for *matinées* were not then invented, and if they had been, the general public was too absorbed in work, business, and society to have supported them.

This concert of Julien's was at the time of the Crimean War, and the grand piece of the first part was Monsieur Julien's "War Quadrilles"—something, I imagine, in the style of the "Battle of Prague." The first figure gave the peaceful valley and the happy inhabitants, then came the crash of war and booming of guns, and finally the peasants galopaded in triumph, after a victory crowned with peace. It was very funny, but the great audience enjoyed it thoroughly, with seemingly little perception of its absurdity.

After this Miss Dolby accompanied herself on a grand piano to "Over the Sea," for a concert quite without singing would have been thought too intolerably dull, and my chaperon whispered

to me she was astonished a really respectable person like Miss Dolby should appear with Julien, "for he ran away with a baker's wife when he was at the last town, though he is married," &c., &c.

We were very particular then about the character of our artistes, and felt personally responsible for them. I knew of one lady who boasted she had never gone to hear Malibran, "because you know she was not respectable and such persons should not be encouraged."

After the respectable Miss Dolby's song, Herr Koenig climbed to the top of the orchestra: he was really a fine trumpet player, second only to the great Harper, and as capable as he of giving the grand solo in the "Messiah," but this time his instrument was a penny trumpet and his piece "Pop goes the weasel," every note of which he made distinctly audible throughout the great building.

In the interval between the two parts of the concert, Julien sat on a gorgeous chair with various members of his band posed round him in admiring attitudes while he pointed out to them the beauties of a score he was reading. He was a curious-looking little man, with a large, colourless, expressionless face, which was strangely like a mask. He conducted in a very vehement, excitable style, his arms and bâton were here, there, and everywhere.

The second part of the concert was entirely classical, and though I had insight enough to recognise the triviality of the first part, I expected to be bored by the second. But no sooner did the orchestra burst out in the grand, glorious *roulades* of Mozart's Jupiter Ammon Symphony (I believe it is called Opus number something now, but I love to recall the fine old name) than a revelation seemed to come to me; I felt suddenly transported into a sunny radiant place, where a gracious benignant face smiled down upon me. I have never heard Mozart's music since without instinctively thinking of sunshine; and I was glad, when I visited Salzburg, to see his native town under the glorious sun of a singularly fine September; it strengthened and continued my impression—an impression which came to me in the most spontaneous way, and which I can neither analyse nor account for; it always recurs whenever I listen to Mozart.

We got no opera in those days in the provinces, Gilbert and Sullivan with their melodious fun did not exist; the English opera was scouted by connoisseurs and the Italian was too costly and exotic, specially as provincial society had then a strong Puritan element, which would have prevented many even among the lovers of music from supporting it. We heard, however, so much of the glories of Italian music, and of the greatness of the Italian singers of it, that Puritans as

well as sinners thirsted for it. An operatic concert was therefore organised, some of the chief operatic stars were engaged, and one act, or part of one act, out of several of the best known operas filled up the programme. There was a full chorus, but the piano represented the orchestra; there was neither scenery, costumes, nor acting, and the concert was given at the Town Hall, not at the theatre. In this way it was agreed even the truly pious might taste the forbidden fruit without injury to tender consciences.

It was on this occasion that I heard Grisi and Mario for the first and last time, and was grievously disappointed, though perhaps my expectations had been raised to such a pitch that nothing could have satisfied them. They were both past their prime as far as voices went: Grisi was still splendidly handsome, but either her voice had failed or she did not choose to exert it. She seemed to think the whole affair below contempt (perhaps it was), lounged on to the platform with all the supercilious airs and affectations of a *grande dame*, sniffed incessantly at her scent-bottle, and cut out as much as she could.

Mario was graceful and gracious: he smiled tenderly in a manner which seemed special to every woman present, and he sang his celebrated scena, "Quel notte in mezzo d'avril," with the

greatest care ; but his treacherous voice betrayed him, and his most sentimental effect was quite spoilt by its sudden break, a curious break like the crow of a cock.

With music at so low a development the standard of Church music was naturally no higher than of the concert room, indeed all parts of the service, prayer, praise, and thanksgiving, were then subordinated to the sermon, and a bright, attractive musical service, such as is often announced now, would have been considered not only irreverent, but impious. The clergyman concerned himself generally so little with the music, except perhaps choosing hymns to harmonise, or accentuate his discourse, that he left the giving them out almost invariably to the clerk, or else a slate or board was hung over the gallery where the singers sat. There were no surpliced and practised choirs, except in cathedrals, and their first introduction in parish churches was for long considered by many as the first step towards popery. The parish clerk, next to the clergyman, was the all-important functionary in the service : he led the responses, which were never intoned, leaving the congregation to come in a good second. The psalms were repeated alternate verses by clergyman and congregation, led by clerk ; in the larger churches they were sometimes sung on the great festivals. There was no music at funerals then, it would have been

thought incongruous; that at weddings was limited to voluntaries, and even these were not general.

In the large old church to which I went as a child, the hymns of Tate and Brady were still used, and the singing was entrusted to three men and a woman, with a powerful soprano, who sat in the organ-loft, a high gallery in front of the organ, which was decorated with a gilt figure of King David in regal robes and crown, playing on a harp: he was the size of a glorified doll, and I much desired to possess him to adorn our nursery. The singers over whom he presided chose their own music (they loved the florid and flourishy), and they executed it in their own style, singing well above the heads of the congregation in the pews below, these careered about the tune, and caught it when they could, when they could not, they contented themselves with another, very often in another key.

In the town churches organs were universal, but in country churches there was the charm of variety and the unexpected, and several kinds of orchestra. Sometimes it was a fiddle, trombone, and 'cello, at others fiddle, flute, and some wind instrument, for these rural bands were most singularly assorted; the players always sat in the west gallery, and in the week-days played at the principal public-house for the cheap balls.

But even in the country well-regulated congre-

gations aspired to the organ, and when they could not afford this substituted the harmonium. The difficulty often was to find players for these new instruments, and one clergyman was, for a time, reduced to his son, who could only play with one finger. He therefore hit on the ingenious expedient of strengthening the performance with a barrel organ devoted to religious tunes, specially to the Old Hundredth. Unluckily, the grinder of the organ did not understand its mechanism, and broke some catch or spring from the handle, which went whirling on of its own accord long after the hymn was finished both by the harmonium player and the other worshippers. Still churning out the tune, it had to be ignominiously carried into the churchyard, in face of the congregation, who were supposed to suppose themselves singing to the harmonium only.

The reform of this state of things came, as such reforms often do, through an effort to revive the past, by the general adoption of Gregorian chants, with echoing and re-echoing strophe and anti-strophe, which suggest what one fancies the chorus to the Greek tragic drama may have been. It was impressive music when intoned by a well-trained choir, but the effect was greatly marred when the untrained members of the congregation chimed in, in fitful gusts. It was too soon judged monotonous by worshippers who desired to express exuberant feelings of prayer and praise,

and after a time *Hymns Ancient and Modern* helped to introduce a much more varied scheme of music, and one which appealed to the religious emotions of all sorts and conditions of men and women.

The same ignorant indifference was shown in the voluntaries played by the organist at the close and beginning of the service. At first these were scrupulously chosen from well-known religious works of the most solemn kind, but sometimes a jocular organist, tired of his limited sacred *répertoire*, would take advantage of the general want of knowledge and ear, and introduce some secular piece, playing it slowly and solemnly to give it a religious sound. In one church with an extremely evangelical and strict pastor, who considered the theatre one of the gates of hell, the organist played the overture to *Don Juan* for some time without detection.

Naturally when the higher developements of music were in this curious state, much could not be expected from the mere amateur. Indeed, music was generally regarded in society as a pleasing feminine accomplishment of no significance compared to literature and the other arts, and decidedly below dancing as a social acquirement. The present change of attitude towards it is greatly the result, not only of increased cultivation, but also of that philosophy of evolution, that enlightened criticism based on historic know-

ledge, which recognises the significance of all human expression, and helps us to classify its manifestations in their different categories. But such a respectful way of considering music would have been considered absurdly pedantic when men and women sat down to eat and drink and rose up to play the piano, at least the women did, their performances being their signal to the lingerers in the dining-room that they were awaited and desired in the drawing-room.

Occasionally a genuine musician would choose for her piece some fine old classic, or some simple melody, and give its true meaning with rare grace and distinction; but even good musicians too often yielded to dominant fashions, and a favourite fashion was some popular air, with variations, when the original *motif* was repeated lightly and brightly in the treble, heavily and solemnly in the bass. Often, too, the overture of the last successful opera was adapted for the piano, generally as a duet, and, worse still, was a very prevalent fashion which obtained for some years of giving, instead of legitimate melody, an imitation of some natural effect. The result was pieces like "Perles d'eau," "Gouttes d'eau," "La Cascade," &c., all ripple and trip. They were very poor, but having a certain novelty they caught on, and it was impossible to escape them. Rossini, I believe, parodied them in somewhat fearful fashion. However, it was not of much

consequence what music was played either at a dinner or supper party, for if it was only the piano no one listened to it, talking went on all the more gaily under its cover; even the shyest found their voices when the music prevented their becoming too audible. And this behaviour was not considered rude; a strange code of manners prevailed: it was impolite to talk when any one was singing, but, until comparatively recently, conversation was allowed during the performance of any kind of instrumental music, and a distinguished pianist was, I remember, thought very pedantic and tiresome because he exacted silence while he was playing. Perhaps, as a rule, the playing justified the talking.

Singing was treated with more respect, though it hardly deserved it: the choice of songs was either some sentimental ditty, or ballad warbled with access of sentiment, or a grand scena or aria from an opera, which the performer had heard given by some celebrated cantatrice. I remember much enjoying "Casta Diva" sung by a singularly plain little person with voice to correspond, who did her very best to imitate the majestic Grisi, whom she had recently heard.

Amateur concerts came into fashion as music became more popular, and ranged from the humble penny reading to the ambitious Charity Concert with guinea tickets. At first it was thought rather fast for ladies to sing at them, but

this shyness soon died away under the disguise of doing good. These performances were depressing, or unconsciously funny, according to the ambitions and goodness or badness of the performers. I remember one at which a very bow-legged, stout little man, with a terrible squint, sang, "Love in her eyes sits playing," and as he put much exaggerated emphasis into his effort, and was besides not at all distinct, the audience mistook it for a comic song and enjoyed and applauded it accordingly.

But whatever we suffered from amateur playing and singing, we were spared the female tyro on the violin. That finest of instruments was considered purely masculine, and so very womanly were we then, that even the sincerely musical girls—and there were many such, despite appearances—had to content themselves with the piano. This was a decided falling back, for Gilbert White speaks in his letters of his niece's violin-playing, praises her fine finger, and mentions her studies, which seem to have been of a serious Handel-esque type. In revenge it was thought effeminate for a man to play on the piano, except as a paid professional—indeed music very rarely formed any part of a boy's education.

Naturally musical criticism corresponded to the general prevalence of musical ignorance. Even great compositions, as Beethoven's Symphonies, were supposed by the outside public to be merely

the individual expression of a genius, who composed as he listed, without work or study, and without reference to great laws of construction. A concert, however, was an opportunity for gushing "copy," specially in a dearth of news, and its writer often spared himself the unnecessary trouble of hearing the music on which he sat in judgment, his *rôle* was to praise, and throw in an occasional musical expression. Printing was slower in those days than now, and therefore the copy was generally prepared carefully and leisurely beforehand. On the occasion of a very grand concert at a well-known musical festival, Bosio was to have sung, but in the morning a telegram was received and posted on the doors of the hall to say that she was suffering from one of those attacks of bronchitis which marred an otherwise great endowment, and that she could not appear. However, the next day's paper did, and contained an elaborate and expansive account of her beautiful singing and the impression she made on the audience, hinting that she outshone all her rivals; it was a good, or bad, long piece of copy, and evidently could not have been cut out without a blank space being left. With dishonest and impudent criticism of this kind, scientific analysis and impartial judgment were obviously hopeless. Luckily the popular taste was not wholly pressed, but managed, despite its ignorance, to keep a certain musical instinct, which was weakened for

a time, but not destroyed, nor indeed radically injured.

And during all this period of English weakness, while there was on the surface so much that was jejune and commonplace, great forces had been at work elsewhere, breaking up and reconstructing old forms and making all things new. The throes of the tardy but life-giving German Renaissance from which Lessing hoped and expected a poet greater even than Shakespeare, gave to the old world, not indeed a new art, but old art in so new and glorious a form as to fill the minds of willing receivers with a sense of revelation. For the great poets of Germany are after all, her musicians. Handel, Haydn, Mozart, Beethoven, men who are her greatest glory, and who have won for her a special place of honour among the peoples of Europe, just as the great artists of Greece and Italy, the poets and writers of England and France, have drawn towards them the sympathy and admiration of all who love beauty in whatever form it may be expressed. Richard Wagner, too, had already begun to write that wonderful music of the future which was so scoffed at by the Philistines of the then present, and is now the chosen delight of the educated connoisseur. These men formed the chiefs of a glorious company whose sound is gone out into all lands and their music unto the ends of the world, loved, honoured, and played by many who know little or

nothing of the works of Schiller, Goethe, or Heine. And the influence of these mighty composers is not limited to the mere refined enjoyment of connoisseurs, it is an intellectual power of the highest value. Huxley himself, sceptical, doubting, questioning, owned that music seemed to him argument in favour of the soul, but indeed every art in its highest manifestations is that, for art is like some wonderful strange language, which man has brought with him from a far country, which he cannot wholly forget, and which ever prevents him being satisfied with material enjoyments, conscious of a feeling of exile, yearning for something which the ordinary conditions of life and the earth cannot give him.

And so at length the time has come, gradually in reality, suddenly in appearance, when music in England has put away the childish things which delighted her earlier years, and the danger now seems lest she should become too scientific, lest her intellectual powers should dwarf her emotional ones, and in her more elaborate developments she should lose her hold on those primitive emotions which for ever sway the great heart of humanity. If she becomes too learned, she will inevitably become exclusive and shut herself and her votaries out from the simpler and humbler of her pleasure forms. It is, however, useless to look forward and unwise to prophesy unless one really knows, and it is better rather to enjoy the goods

the gods provide in the present, and to be thankful also that they have banished others to the limbo of almost forgotten absurdities. Among these are the "star" system, the scrappy programme, the singer who believed singing need not be taught or studied but came spontaneously, and other foolish doctrines too numerous to mention.

Instead of isolated and often contradictory teaching we have now colleges of music, with their staffs of professors, where not only are singers carefully trained, but also players who may hereafter form part of an orchestra, and so give music in its noblest form. Better still these colleges act as a kind of sieve where those who cannot pass, or who fall below a certain standard are shut out, and plainly told of their deficiencies, and thus they are saved wasting time and money, and others spared irritating inflictions.

Some twenty or thirty years ago quartet or orchestral music could be very rarely heard out of London, and then only in certain musical cliques, and the great trust of the concert giver was the song of the star. Now London is able to boast as good an orchestra as any continental one, and concerts of instrumental music, chamber (including genuine chamber music, exquisitely played on the original instruments by the gifted Dolmetsch family), quartet, symphonic, are constantly given, with good performers and at moderate prices. Orchestras too are being formed in every town with any pretensions to musical culture, and

everywhere music is being carefully and intelligently studied. The yearning for human sympathy and fellowship in the arts, the grand principles of co-operation and subordination are recognised now to their fullest extent in music, and by and by this honest effort and this abundant promise must result in finest achievement.

The spirit too of the listener is changed. Many among the large audiences can appreciate critically, and study and recognise the many and varied forms of musical expression, according to carefully considered art canons. Others, like myself, are content with primitive ignorance and yet succeed in keeping a certain instinctive enjoyment of even grand compositions, which have their message for the unlearned as well as the learned. We should, I think, be capable of appreciating Wagner himself if he did not play so intolerably on our heart strings, and emphasise so acutely and morbidly the lesson most of us learn less melodiously, that the world is full of tragic mistakes and tears. And thus both as an art and science music seems now enthroned in her rightful place in the heart of the multitude, honoured and loved not as a mere trivial, insignificant pastime, but as one of the most delightful and cheering influences that can console and elevate the mind of man and make him glad and of cheerful countenance in his weary pilgrimage to an unknown goal.

A LITERARY REFORMER

1

2

3

4

5

6

7

8

9

10



VI

A LITERARY REFORMER

THE realm of literature is too often supposed a happy-go-lucky territory, ruled by lawless chance, where the wilful winds of genius blow without any regulating power. But even literature has to obey certain laws, lest form sink into mere formality, extravagance supersede strength, and feebleness be supposed refinement. When these things happen and literature becomes divorced from the national life and aspirations it should represent, reform is inevitable, though the actual reforming work is rarely recognised.

And greatest perhaps, and most wonderful among literary reformers, stands Ephraim Gotthold Lessing, who may be truly said to have laid the foundations of German literature as it is now recognised by all the other nations of Europe. That the special character of his work is comparatively very little known, is but natural; it can be only truly estimated by the study of German literature before his advent, and

that study is of the dreariest. For the history of German literature shows a singularly intermittent development, when knowledge and criticism preceded and sometimes rather stifled achievement, unlike English literature which was developed impulsively, with sublime indifference to fixed rules, yet was sequent and uninterrupted, always representative of national aspirations and ideals; sometimes grand and full like a great river, sometimes dwindling into the expression of academic thought and aristocratic culture, but never wholly exhausted, or unworthy study as interpreting English life.

In Germany, on the contrary, after the artless beauty of the legendary and Nibelungen lieder stage, we get only theological literature or a derived and imported one; for in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth century literature was not made in Germany, but consisted chiefly of translations from, and imitations of, the French.

The unwieldy German empire had received the shock of the Renaissance, which had vivified other nations into active literary and artistic life, not directly, but weakened and attenuated through French and artificial sources. There was no true national life on which to build a great art or literature. The empire, which had lost its ancient significance, still held national life in suspense, and its numerous small courts

were neither truly German nor, in spite of affectations and pretence, at all French, though they imitated the French Court, and spoke the French language with much heavy provincialism. As for the middle classes, who had not even the life of a small court, the extreme poverty, caused by prolonged and devastating wars, had forced them into a hard struggle for very existence, in which religion and austere religious observances seemed their only relief. Under these circumstances it is not surprising that the commonplace and weakly artificial reigned without protest. With the exception of some hymns, German poetry for many years before Lessing's time is hardly readable; it is of the bread-and-butter school. Klopstock was its Milton, and the Germans thought him sublime.

But though the muse of German literature was silent, she was not dead, but sleeping—sleeping like the Princess of the Briar Rose, and bye and bye Lessing, the destined young Prince, forced his way through the thick hedge of thorns, and the obstacles of prejudices and ignorance which had grown round her and shut her away from her true life. Naturally the Princess and her maidens being German, tried to turn again to their spinning-wheels, but the men around them awoke with music in their hearts and a new song on their lips, and life was different.

The conditions, however, of Lessing's birth

and upbringing were anything but princely, for he was the eldest of the twelve children of the Pastor of Kamenz, Silesia (1729), which means, being interpreted, that he was born to dire poverty, and subjected to the rigid discipline of a narrow, intolerant, and stern religious creed. His father was a very able man, but as his family and poverty increased, he became more and more pessimistic, more and more convinced that the world was plunging daily deeper and deeper into moral ruin and degradation. Luckily, whatever else his son might lack, he was endowed with a vigorous will, which seemed ever to prompt him to stubborn and resolute opposition, and it is probable that the convictions and thoughts which he afterwards gave to the world in his *Education of the Human Race*, with their hopeful suggestions of continued progress, their anticipation of evolution in the spiritual and intellectual growth of man were originally suggested by, and, reactionary from, his father's gloomy Calvinism.

One other advantage Lessing had, and that was a thorough classic grounding of the old-fashioned sort at St. Afra's School, Meissen, and then he was sent to Leipsic, where his father hoped that this promising youth, of whom the masters and professors spoke in wondering, almost awestruck admiration, would receive that final teaching which should make him a shining light of Evangelical divinity. Lessing certainly did

learn a great deal at Leipsic, but not exactly what his father wished. To the uncouth, untravelled country youth, life in a town with any pretensions to refined society and amusement was a revelation, and instead of devoting himself to theology, he determined to become, as far as he could, a cultivated man of this world. Above all things he discovered at Leipsic a new intellectual delight, destined ever after to haunt his imagination and influence his life, for it was at Leipsic that he went for the first time to the theatre and recognised the high position of that drama which afterwards became his absorbing study; he made friends with the actors, and began at once to write for the stage.

But his enjoyment of town life was short. A travelling neighbour visited him and reported at Kamenz such godless conduct, such wicked enjoyment of theatrical and other unhallowed amusements, that poor Lessing was quickly summoned by a false report of his mother's dangerous illness, summoned to an uncongenial home, where his sister lit the oven with some carefully prepared translations from Anacreon, which he had left on his desk, and which she judged unfit for family reading.

It was, however, impossible for Lessing to remain at Kamenz; poverty, as well as ambition, drove him forth, and after a short stay at Leipsic, where he renewed his friendship with the actors,

he went to live at Berlin, possibly because they had an engagement there.

It was at Berlin that Lessing began his life-long task of reforming German literature, freeing it from the bonds of stiff dogma and trite morality and the servitude of French imitation, substituting instead noble models of stately German.

A great reformer generally presents himself as a hero, who gives articulate expression to the necessity of abolishing great abuses, which others perceive besides himself, though they have made no successful struggle against them, waiting for a leader. One thinks, therefore, of a reformer as well backed by vigorous and sometimes powerful friends, who recognise the value of his work, and do what they can to help him defeat the angry opposition he is sure to excite. But it was not so with Lessing, who stands for ever alone: those who appreciated and sympathised with his aim were very, very few.

They were at first chiefly Nicolai and Mendelssohn (the grandfather of Felix), with both of whom he formed a friendship, cemented by similarity of thought and object, and later on Heinrich von Kleist, his beloved friend, the author of the remarkably brilliant comedy, *The Broken Jug*. Besides these were some few who estimated Lessing's work for its brilliant literary merits and wonderful and accurate scholarship; but he

had no influential friends or powerful clique to sound his praises, and he soon destroyed any chance of court favour by offending Voltaire during one of his visits to Berlin. Lessing helped his secretary and over-persuaded him to lend him an unpublished MSS. of his master's, promising faithfully to return the work by a certain hour, before its author could know of the loan. With his habitual absent-mindedness he forgot his promise as soon as his curiosity was satisfied, with disastrous consequences to the secretary and himself. Voltaire went into a towering rage, and was by no means appeased by Lessing's independent attitude, and many attribute Frederick the Great's persistent neglect of the great writer, who was doing for German literature much the same work that he was doing for her politics, to Voltaire's adverse influence.

Nor could Lessing substitute for the patronage of the court what should be the more worthy and lucrative patronage of popular favour; the Germans of his day could not appreciate him and were indifferent to his high standard; and after all, a literary reformer stands on a different footing to an ecclesiastical or political one, who has always some background of place or interest to heighten his claims on public sympathy. It needed considerable literary culture to estimate Lessing's critical and literary genius, and it was

just that, naturally, that his fellow-countrymen lacked, therefore he had not even that genial, social recognition which helps to cheer the lions of literature.

But even if he had at once realised how long, how strenuous, and how painful his work was to be, he would not have abated one jot of his high courage. He recognised from the first that if he would succeed in raising the stately edifice of national literature, he must rescue the site from the pretentious builders who were striving to cover it with imported French theatrical properties, sham ruins, and utterly commonplace constructions, interspersed here and there with gloomy conventicles.

It was congenial labour ; for Lessing was a born fighter, and frankly owned he gloried in the joy of combat even more than in the crown of victory. He was full of hope and ardour. It seemed as though no exertion could tire his young energy.

His first conspicuous victim was Gottsched, the popular writer of feeble romances, copied and translated from the French. He was a pompous pretender, the head of a certain clique, a literal bigwig, for he wore a huge wig on a stand on his study table, and always kept his visitors waiting in the rudest manner while he adjusted it to show his importance. Dull and tedious as his books were, they had brought him considerable reputation, which had never been

questioned till he toppled over before Lessing's swift charge and polished thrust, in ludicrous and indignant amaze, dragging down with him many a smaller reputation.

Then Lange was deposed from his supremacy as first scholar in Germany, and his pretensions exposed with satirical erudition which audaciously hinted he could not even read that Horace whom he expounded so confidently. The irate and astonished professors and scholars who rushed to defend him were soon down before the new knight's overwhelming charge, and crushed in the *mêlée*. Indeed Lessing was a genius in the gentle art of making enemies, and he was *naïvely* surprised when his victims resented criticisms which were so obviously for their own good and for that of literature and scholarship.

Where the interests of *those* were concerned Lessing grudged no trouble, no research, nothing seemed to bore him. He inquired into everything, and he took infinite care that what he wrote should not be stamped by the prevailing heavy dulness. Moreover, he always maintained a certain courtesy to his opponents, never condescending to personalities. He was a most amazing appearance in that formal German world of letters, where were many provincial reputations, established on the most slender basis, and gravely accepted by the general, who

read occasionally as a kind of solemn duty, without any critical judgment or, one would think, without any kind of enjoyment. There was indeed nothing but improving reading and moral poetry—a most depressing literature.

And Lessing had not only to fight for clear space, he had to make his own tools as he went on, by reforming the German language, which had become adulterated and watery, and was as corrupt and feeble as the books for which it was used; indeed it was looked on by the aristocratic and cultured as a mere dialect unfit for refined thought or literary expression. Amongst other charges against it, was the French one, that it was incapable of epigram, but from Lessing's pen epigram came naturally. He moulded his German on the antique, building his sentences on the concise Roman style, mortising his words well together, choosing them carefully, and his German compared to that of Jean Paul's seems another language.

Lessing is clear, incisive, polished, and the verb has not to be searched for at one end of a sentence, while the governing nominative is almost forgotten at the other, a search carried on through perhaps half a page of print, with parenthesis within parenthesis, involved, intricate like the carved and enclosed boxes of the Chinese. The English reader would have had cause for permanent gratitude if Lessing's contemporaries

and successors had only appreciated and imitated his style rather more closely.

And to all this work and fighting Lessing added a vigorous appreciative study of foreign literatures, adapting, recommending, translating anything from them he thought likely to improve German taste. Though a classicist by birth and education, he was too liberal-minded and catholic not to recognise genius wherever he found it, and he, even more emphatically than Goethe, was the first founder of the Teutonic cult of Shakespeare.

But Lessing by no means limited his exertions to criticism and scholarship; he had a singular and very characteristic method of working, excessively methodical and exhaustive in research, and therefore generally lacking that perhaps rare but highest charm of complete spontaneity. Before he wrote in any special form he made a precise study of it, pointed out its significance, which might be expressed in it, what might not, and then gave a specimen of his own composition. I know no other great literary man who has worked in this extremely conscientious manner, and indeed a great deal of Lessing's critical work was as much to clear the ground for his own achievements as to point out the deficiencies of others.

His fables are a case in point; they were the short story of the period, and Lessing first made an interesting study of them in ancient and modern

literature, and then wrote some himself. They are still good reading, from their biting wit or their quaint moral, as the well-known one of the "Cock on the Dunghill," whom Lessing turns into a pedantic German professor scratching up a pearl of research, for a Frenchman who knows how to use and set and get the credit of it. Another about the Furies, though strictly impersonal, makes one think of his sister's violent prudery.

As a poet it must be owned that Lessing was not so pre-eminently successful as a prose writer. His poetry is never poor—all he did had a stamp of distinction—it is always of certain excellence, but it never quite soars. It lacks passion, abandon, imagery, it is studio poetry rather than poetry wrought under the open sky, amid the great impulses of life. Still it has not the all-prevailing faults of its time, languid diction and prosy description: it was modelled too carefully on classic models for that, perhaps its chief deficiency is lack of the personal, penetrating note.

But however diverse Lessing's work might be, he had one ambition which he never lost sight of—that, namely, of the creation of a great national drama. All his work tended to this end; even that wonderful critical work, the *Laokoon*, by which he gained European fame, was but a preliminary study for the drama, though from its unfinished conclusion it is accepted now primarily

as art criticism its special aim not being fully wrought out.

It is in every way an astounding work, and is becoming more and more recognised instead of sinking into that neglect which awaits so much criticism, specially art criticism. Its erudition is amazing. When Lessing wants to prove an argument, or illustrate a point, he turns indifferently to the poetry or prose of Greece or Rome, of France, Italy, or England. He knows exactly what he wants, where to find, how to use it aptly. His great intellectual strength enabled him to bear this extraordinary weight of learning lightly, to use it gracefully. There is nothing pedantic, no hint of consciousness of extraordinary acquirements. The style is polished and clear, the thought definite, and there is sincere enthusiasm though no ecstatic rapture.

The art knowledge, or rather knowledge of works of art, is not perhaps equal to Lessing's knowledge of literature; he had few opportunities of studying Art, except in the then but slightly developed museums and galleries of Berlin and some other German towns. But those opportunities had been used to the utmost in the search for Art principles, and prove that it is not the many opportunities that make a connoisseur, so much as the few subjects thoroughly mastered.

Treatises on art were all the fashion just then ;

every one was analysing and trying to discover its first principles, and statesmen and scholars were striving to formulate an æsthetic credo which should justify the ways of Art to man. Lessing read and criticised these treatises, in whatever language they were written, and his own stands a head and shoulders above them all, still full of interest and teaching, and of grand general principles which help the student even now.

Yet with all its earnestness and thoroughness the *Laokoon* has none of the enthusiastic, gushing æstheticism of some modern works written by those of many opportunities, who pursue their culture through a fascinating round of picture galleries and museums, combining the pleasures of travel with easy self-improvement. Lessing's culture was gained strenuously through laborious study and deep research, and while many emotional works of art are like misty valleys, where one can find an occasional pretty flower, but get no clear view, his is like a height which commands a wide prospect of things not seen from below, where one breathes a keen, rarefied air, that braces one's energies and makes one think differently and more resolutely ever afterwards. And however tiring it may be, it is well to climb sometimes and realise the significance of Art under guidance which points out its great and austere side, rather than its pretty charm or religious symbolism.

When the *Laokoon* was published Winckelman had just issued his great work on Greek art, creating for it, in perhaps a somewhat narrower and better-informed circle, much the same interest as Ruskin, in these later days, excited for Italian and mediæval art, and Voltaire had passed swift judgment on the arts, and supposed himself to have settled controversy in an epigram which declared that painting was "silent poetry, poetry, speaking painting."

This was the last spur to Lessing's energies; he never missed the opportunity of a tilt at his old adversary, and the subject had long occupied his thoughts and been much discussed by him with his friends Nicolai and Mendelssohn, and especially with that dearly loved friend Heinrich von Kleist, whose tragic end formed a sad epoch in Lessing's unhappy life.

The main point of inquiry in the *Laokoon* is the limits of the two arts of poetry and painting, how far they differ and also their similarity; and the group of the *Laokoon* was chosen for special illustration, as the cultured world was then deeply exercised by the question as to whether the artist had worked from Virgil's description, or Virgil taken the group for his poetry. There were points of difference: Virgil had spoken of the loud cry uttered by the wretched father when he found himself in the grip of the terrible serpent, but in the sculptured group his mouth is only

open far enough for a sigh. And Winckelman's explanation was that the sculptor wished to express in this way the greatness of the Greek hero, who would not even in such dire anguish utter any expression of pain. Lessing immediately proves by many quotations from Greek plays, &c., that the Greeks were not ashamed of expressing their feelings and did not, like the savage, cultivate a barbaric stoicism and immobility to suffering: their only dread was lest it should lead them to dishonourable action; therefore the half-closed mouth was simply an artistic not a moral necessity. The quite open mouth would have distorted the face, and he protests against the mischief done in poetry from the desire to describe; in painting, from the use of allegory. By this he evidently means, as in the instance above given, the attempt to express the abstract in the concrete.

As usual he makes grave fun of the "Greek" Voltaire before tearing his epigram to pieces, and he uses a book by another Frenchman, Count Caylus, *Tableaux tires de l'Illiade*, as the drunken Helot, an elaborate example of what should not be done. He asks what notion we could have of Homer, if his poetry had perished and only the illustrations survived, and points out that the riches of the poet are generally the poverty of the painter.*

* As, for instance, *S. Agnes' Eve*, Keats' description suggests a beautiful mental picture, but it was not successful on canvas.

He makes special satire of one of Caylus' favourite pictures, the appearance of Helen to the elders of Troy, and declares that a circle of old men gazing at her (veiled by the bye according to Homer) with every expression of admiration, of which the chief is the displeasing one of elderly appreciation of beauty—simply revolting. He is honest, however, and pronounces his own favourite picture from Homer, that, viz., of Pandarus choosing his arrow with successive gestures and then sending it to its mark, whizzing through the air, equally unpaintable.

His own suggestion for good illustration from Homer is a somewhat bald description of a pillared palace, which the painter may enrich at will. But the suggesting of pictures to the artist is not the first attribute of the poet, he must indeed have them in his mind, and arouse them in that of his readers, but in both cases they must be mental, or as we should say now, visualised. The New Testament, though merely stating facts, giving neither poetry nor poetic description, contains, he points out, endless suggestions for pictures, and is far more valuable in this way than Homer or Milton with their picturesque descriptions.

Evidently in Lessing's time both poetry and painting had begun to enlarge their boundaries in a quiet, popular way, the first by taking up word-painting, the latter by illustration, not choosing its own subject, but borrowing the invention of the painter.

Such interchange and confusion were abhorrent to Lessing's high standard, his appreciation of the great dignity both of Art and of literature, and he is resolute to define the limits which neither must overpass. Perhaps his objection to Art as illustrating literature would be less strong in these highly educated days than in his, for, as he points out, in illustrative art the spectator must know the book as well as the picture; thus the Art appeal is limited to the well read, though he does not perhaps recognise fully that one reason why the New Testament has been so popular among painters is that it is so well known that its pictures need no explanation. However this may be, Lessing protests that painting and poetry must make a separate appeal, that colours have no sound, and ears no eyes; evidently the fine modern confusion of epitaphs, the colour terms applied to musical criticism, the musical terms to painting, and descriptions of all kinds, would have seemed to him mere lunacy.

In order, then, to rescue both art and literature from what he thought impending danger, he gives a philosophic definition of the special spheres of both.

Poetry is sound, articulated in successive moments of time.

Painting form and colour in space.

It follows, therefore, that the special subject of painting is bodies; actions, that of poetry, which

must limit its descriptions to actions following each other rapidly, each characterised by a single adjective and leading to a climax without delay, so that an impression of unity is given. Lessing will have none of your "so it was," and "here was," and "there was," the impression on the reader must be clear-cut, the essential attributes only given; more important still, the effect must definitely indicate the cause.

To illustrate his meaning he takes a long description of a beautiful woman from Ariosto, shows its mere catalogue merits and contrasts his descriptions with Homer's, who gives, for instance, the history of Agamemnon's sceptre to show its significance, instead of telling what it was made of.

As painting has only one moment, which must for ever remain the same, it must naturally choose the most pregnant, and that Lessing declares to be not the final supreme one, that must be left to the spectator's imagination, but the one immediately preceding. And the artist must select, and remembering the permanence which through the special medium of his art he gives to momentary emotion, he must avoid all expression which distorts the lines of the face. For instance, Agamemnon should be veiled at the sacrifice of Iphigenia, lest his stereotyped anguish should not only pall on the spectator, but destroy that effect of beauty, that perfection of form,

which are the true aims of art. Lessing's art standards were not those of the present day; he did not think that Art, like democracy, must be purely representative, and reflect every passing mood, every passion or sentiment, good or evil, in which man chooses to indulge, every phase of a life which is ever changing.

For him Art was leading the search after and the expression of beauty; must avoid the trivial and choose the noblest forms and deeds for its models, and by its influence man will rise to a higher perfection of mental and physical life.

It is too strict, too high a conception of Art, for the eager life of to-day, which, recognising its own transitoriness, strives to seize the passing moments, the changing expression, and is for ever flinging its fleeting emotions, its paltry delights, and regrets into what it calls art forms; and, moreover, Lessing's philosophic analysis of Art is limited by his intense, fastidious admiration of form, his indifference to, and comparative ignorance of, the charm of colour.

And the reader is soon conscious that the *Laokoon* is unfinished, and that much as Lessing had said on Art, he had not said his last word. That was flung carelessly to the world some years after in the *Hamburgische Dramaturgie*—a series of criticisms in the form of short articles. In them he justifies his high estimate of the drama on the intellectual ground of its containing and com-

bining the successive moments of poetry and the supreme one of painting.

As usual this elaborate criticism was precursor to a constructive work, when Lessing illustrated his principles in *Minna von Barhelm*, which may be claimed as the first German comedy which equalled, and in some points surpassed, contemporary work in other countries.

It may seem to us now a rather small outcome for such far reaching preliminary research, a small building to be entered by so wonderful a portico, but Lessing's fellow-countrymen hailed it with delight. It must have come to them like a reviving draught of good Rhenish wine after a long course of thick, heavy beer or badly bottled champagne, and they had justification for their enthusiasm. The comedy is finely and firmly constructed, though perhaps too conventional for these lax days; it is thoroughly actable, with good scenic effects and bright dialogue, and can still be read with pleasure.

Both the *Laokoon* and *Minna von Barhelm* were written at Breslau, when an appointment under General Tauentzien enabled Lessing to work at unaccustomed leisure, without the printer's devil waiting behind the door for "copy"; but with that restless discontent, born perhaps of over-work, to which he was subject, he gave up the post after a comparatively short time. Then that persistent ill luck which ever pursued him threw what

seemed most congenial employment in his way. Some friends who had been deeply impressed by his dramatic work and criticism, pressed on him the management and direction of the theatre at Hamburg. It was a most artless proceeding to give a man a post of very difficult and complicated business affairs, on the mere strength of his literary genius. Lessing was proverbially absent-minded, he had no organising ability, no preliminary business training, and when he substituted for these deficiencies an impossible standard of professional excellence, he soon reduced everything to chaos.

The one very necessary reform which he insisted on, though it heightened his reputation, increased for the time the difficulties of management by producing something of a mutiny among the supers. Lessing insisted on their attending rehearsals, and learning to carry themselves, and move naturally according to the effect they were to produce ; he was convinced, he said, that training and use were more necessary for stage success than even genius, but badly paid helpers, who were unaccustomed to such strict measures, would not accept the reform without protest. Lessing's fame at first attracted the best actors and actresses, but even these, supported by the novelty of carefully drilled crowds, &c., were not enough to keep a theatre going, when the time of performance was gloriously uncertain, and the actors never knew the precise

date of any particular play. Naturally the theatre closed with financial and artistic disappointment.

But in spite of this Lessing had achieved very remarkable work at Hamburg, and left his mark on German drama; the stage accessories never again sank into the same slovenly neglect as before his reform, the details of the supers, &c., were thoroughly well attended to, and we have still a valuable record of his experience at Hamburg in the series of letters which he wrote criticising the plays and actors.

It is in these that we find, as I have said, the true conclusion of the *Laokoon*, in the justification of his estimate of the drama as combining the special attributes of both poetry and painting, the developing moments of the one, the great moment of complete development of the other.

Lessing wonders in the *Laokoon* why Winckelman did not go a step farther in his inquiries; one finds this curious arrested thought everywhere, and I, for my part, wonder Lessing in the *Dramaturgie* did not take another forward step, and add music to the drama. The elder Mendelssohn had already given a hint of it in a note to the *Laokoon*, where he would make dancing and music help to the perfecting of drama. And had Lessing joined music to those other arts he loved so well, he would have been the pioneer of Wagner, as he assuredly was that of Goethe, all the more so as it was through Lessing that the beauties

of the *Nibelung liedier* were rediscovered and restored to German literature. He may have perceived the tremendous, perhaps insuperable, difficulty of Grand Opera, which lies in man's inadequacy, rather than in the form itself; in the impossibility of finding a genius equally endowed as painter, poet, musician; or the still greater difficulty of finding three men of genius who would work harmoniously together.

It is in the *Dramaturgie* that Lessing set forth with strong conviction the claims of Shakespeare as the greatest of dramatists since the Greeks. He compares him with his old enemy Voltaire, and points out with triumphant appreciation that while Shakespeare is full of love and passion in his tragedies, the Frenchman can only give gallantry. French gallantry always irritated Lessing; he is Bismarckian in his hatred of it, and has some amusing sneers at a French tragedy of *Philoctetes*, where the heroic sufferer is supposed to be consoled in his intolerable anguish, and his desertion on the desolate island, by a princess being left behind with him.

And Lessing protested too against the French method of strict insistence on the unities of time and place. The great Shakespeare had neglected them, and Lessing asserts that they were not pre-existent, not evolved that art might conform to them, but have been carefully deduced from the works of the ancients, who, when they wrote,

knew and thought little about rules, and aimed chiefly at effect. But interesting as is all this criticism even now, the value of it lies in the definition of the place of the drama; it is Lessing's final verdict on the arts he honoured so greatly, and should, I think, be bound, as supplement to the *Laokoon*, in the same volume.

Lessing's fame was made at last, and it seems astonishing that his King still did not recognise him. But Frederick made no sign, and the great author, disappointed, indeed almost in despair, accepted the appointment of librarian to the Duke of Brunswick at Wolfenbüttel.

The library there was magnificent, but passionately as Lessing loved books he was no book-worm. He delighted in conversation, argument, and discussion, and specially needed society and excitement to rouse him from a constant tendency to dejection and too profound reflection; he had even taken to gambling at Breslau to divert his thoughts and stimulate his spirits. To such a man a little, dull, formal, ducal town was most cruel exile. He was, until his marriage, as isolated there as the Philoctetes for whom he felt so profound a pity, forsaken on his desert island. He had not one congenial companion, or any relief from daily monotony; the Duke, though proud of having secured the services of so distinguished a librarian, never treated him with any personal consideration, and poor Lessing had not

even the soothing comfort which the country gives to some fagged brains. He cared for it as little as Dr. Johnson, and openly avowed his complete indifference to the changing seasons. He did not even feel those tender sentiments which so generally stir Teutonic blood at the return of spring, and break out poetic Schwärmerei. He had therefore nothing but the library, and complained bitterly, almost fretfully, that the book dust was falling on his nerves.

But his indomitable powers of work seemed as great as ever, and he soon gave Germany her first acting tragedy in the native tongue, *Emilia Galotti*. It is not so good after its kind as *Minna von Barhelm*, and indeed I can hardly think Lessing was capable of writing soul-stirring, convincing tragedy. He was too intellectually polished and well balanced to be capable of that excess and extravagance which works itself off in high emotion, and the tragedy of his own life, and of his then conditions was not of the dramatic, inspiring kind.

The plot of *Emilia Galotti* is practically the same as that of *Virginius*, a soldier father stabbing his daughter to save her from dishonour. The scene is laid at a small German court, whose reigning Prince enacts the part of Claudius by the help of his first courtier Marinelli, and the plot is complicated by the engagement of Emilia. On the day of the wedding, however, the bride-

groom is killed by Marinelli's means, and she is seized and kept a prisoner by the Prince. Then her father arrives for the wedding, obtains an interview with his daughter, and, after a short conversation, stabs her and goes to give himself up to justice. Tragic enough, but not tragedy, for we get no impress of a destiny which could not be escaped, rather are provoked by a set of people who might have saved themselves from misfortune by wit and resolution.

And it is the more extraordinary that Lessing should have missed this vital point, as in the *Dramaturgie* he has some very keen remarks on the necessity of a *Deus ex machina* to give a noble atmosphere to tragedy, and points out that its victims should belong to either court or camp, because then they are above and beyond the law; the commonplace suggestion of the police-court and the execution are avoided, and the chief protagonist falls directly to the vengeance of the great gods, and the divine Nemesis, instead of submitting to the legal justice of man. This, of course, is the somewhat obvious explanation of Shakespeare's use of witches and ghosts, &c., and it is noteworthy that in the three tragedies where he dispenses with supernatural agencies he substitutes, in the one case, fierce civil strife, in the two others the wickedness of people who are in truth so unnaturally wicked as to be almost as wonderful as the supernatural agencies they replace.

Lessing evidently meant Marinelli to be irresistibly wicked, but he is a mere low intriguer, and, besides, both he and his princely patron are left only to their own remorse, which was hardly likely to be very agonising, and while the knave and the scoundrel escape scot free, their victims perish, for one feels that Galotti must inevitably be condemned either by court martial or judge.

But the real failure of *Emilia Galotti* is the character of Emilia herself. Lessing knew nothing of women, and he who would write tragedies without a large knowledge and experience of them is but poorly equipped. I think almost the only penetrating remark he makes about them is that they can never discern between the essentials and non-essentials of life, and that amount of discrimination would not carry him far in the description of passion.

Emilia is, in short, not worked from the life, but from book study, and I strongly suspect Clarissa Harlowe was her model. Richardson's novel had made a deep impression on Lessing. He had already used it for *Miss Sara Simpson*, his first dramatic work, which was not chiefly a reminiscence of his classic studies. Even one point in the plot of *Emilia*, viz., her abduction, suggests Clarissa, and there is much resemblance in the characters, as a somewhat maundering sentimentality, but above all Emilia's doubt as to whether she could for long resist the Prince. This might

be not unnatural in a philosophic, but court-loving German maiden, but it is intolerably undramatic. She and her father discuss the situation and his own awful remedy in a cold-blooded way at the most critical moment, when the crisis should be rushed.


Still *Emilia Galotti* is interesting even now as one of the early tragedies of the new philosophy, which places man's destiny in his character rather than in his conditions; and as experiments of this kind are rarely successful in the first instance, it is not perhaps surprising that it was reserved for Ibsen to solve the problem of bourgeois tragedy. But coldly as *Emilia Galotti* may strike us now, it was then the first tragedy written in the German tongue, was received as epoch-making, and constantly played to enthusiastic audiences.

It was not the only tragedy of Lessing's stay in Wolfenbüttel. He discovered there certain MSS., writings of Prof. Reimarius, of a theologic, deistic character, and, less judicious than their original author, he published them. The fierce anger which blazed up in religious or rather sectarian England when the *Essays and Reviews* first appeared, pales before the storm of wrath which fell on Lessing's devoted head, and he had no coadjutors to help him to support it. As usual, part of the offensive new doctrine seems to have been doubts as to the eternity of punishment; this always appears

to distress and shock certain minds, perhaps because people find in it something to appease their outraged sense of justice at the unequal distribution of prosperity in this world, and it consoles them to feel that those who offend them in this and other ways will have to pay a heavier price for their present happiness hereafter. But besides, Germany was not advanced enough for any free discussion, specially on religious subjects, and Lessing had to bear the penalty of his superiority.

Though he was worn by disappointment and toil, and physically weakened by illness, his pluck and spirit was as undaunted as ever. As so often happens in religious controversies, cruel personalities were introduced, he was reproached with his poverty, his habits, and tauntingly asked if a comedian could be a preacher, or know anything of religion. Lessing retorted by exposing the ignorance and weak reasoning of men who occupied high positions as the religious teachers of Germany, and the scandal grew to such a height that Lessing was at length silenced, not by his opponents — he would never have lowered his flag to them—but by the Duke himself, who commanded he should write no more on the subject.

Lessing obeyed, but turned, according to his own expression, to his old pulpit, the drama, and wrote *Nathan de Weise* as a grand impersonal plea for religious tolerance. If the circumstances



had not been so painful it would be humorous to find the great critic breaking the law he had laid down with such emphasis against the writing a work of art for a moral purpose. Under such conditions it would be futile to expect in *Nathan de Weise* the over-mastering imagination and abandon necessary for a thrilling drama, but it is and will ever remain a noble academic work. Unlike his previous dramatic works, which were in prose, *Nathan de Weise* is in fine, sonorous blank verse, and contains the well-known religious apologue of the three rings; there is very little plot, and that little confused, but the swing of the verse and the fineness of thought still keep it interesting to study. Until comparatively recently it was frequently acted in Germany, but it must have been an extraordinary tax on the chief actor, as there is little action, and the effects depend almost exclusively on his powers of eloquence and declamation. With it Lessing's work for the stage ended; he was nearly spent with suffering and toil; but it was not his last work, that was *The Education of the Human Race*; like the *Laokoon* it was but the prelude to what would have been a very great work.

The mere fragment is a high landmark, not only for German, but all European religious thought, one which humanity has as yet hardly reached, which it will be very long ere it leaves behind. In it instead of gloomy Calvinism we

have a hopeful suggestion of progress, gained by the struggles and fruitful experience of humanity, handing on the hardly won enlightenment from generation to generation. To Lessing thought is sequent, developed from age to age and verified by slowly accumulating knowledge, the materialistic interpretation of revelation, constantly replaced by the symbolic one, or, as Pascal would have said, the figurative one. The dominant idea of the work is much more familiar to us now than when Lessing wrote, we have grown accustomed to it in every sphere of thought; for it is the doctrine of evolution which is anticipated and given in spiritual form. It is full of hope, and strikes the true note of Christianity, the looking forward and onward, instead of like the Pagan religions ever regretting the golden past. To Lessing, man's interpretation of revelation must be progressive, and humanity as capable of learning as is the individual—the perishing individual, whose experience and sufferings are not wasted but enrich the world. Like so much of Lessing's work, it is in short paragraphs, into which he literally packs his thoughts. In one of these he speaks of the chasm between the natural and supernatural, over which he cannot leap, in a poignant personal tone which should for ever clear him of any charge of mere unbelief from pride of intellect, any reckless accusation of wilful atheism.

And then the "godless controversialist," the

polished scholar, the strenuous fighter in argument, the man who had endured so greatly, uttered his last cry to that Germany for whom he had done so much, and who had cruelly withheld her full recognition. "And if in this economy of salvation *one* soul should be lost."

I am not of those who presume to pity the sorrows of genius, I suspect that the sorrows of stupidity, though perhaps less poignant, are more intolerable. I was once cheated out of much tender young emotion, and made to feel the pangs of unmerited remorse, by the picturesque description of a certain celebrated landscape painter who was represented as dying in solitude, unappreciated and friendless. More accurate information convinced me that that genius owed his forlorn end, not to the excess of his endowment, but to his deficiencies and to his peculiarities, and that his recognition by the public had been generous and ungrudging.

And I must sorrowfully confess that Lessing must have been a very difficult man to deal with. He would have his own way, and nothing would induce him to walk in those paths of the prudent which lead to immediate recognition and worldly success; he preferred to climb towards perfection, instead of contenting himself with a mediocrity which could have been easily appreciated.

He had a remarkable power of putting himself in the wrong, even when he may have been in

the right, and his extreme absent-mindedness (more accurately perhaps his mental preoccupations), as in the case of his offence to Voltaire, often made him seem culpable when he was only heedless or absorbed. It intensified his difficulties and gave him over as a prey to impostors. Then he did not weigh his words when fighting pretence and affectation, and was very satirical when men of letters gave themselves airs of superiority. He knew his own value, but was scornful of egoism, maintaining that the private affairs of an author were no concern of the public; he loved excitement in times when religion condemned amusement, was addicted to gambling (he said to divert his mind from the sorrow of von Kleist's death), and was constantly in debt.

But when every accusation has been made against Lessing, he stands a man of misfortune which no care could avert, the causes out of his control. The bitter poverty of his youth hampered all his life and when he had a post at Breslau the poor family at Kamenz applied constantly for help, under the impression he was rich, and he never refused it. From the nature of his work he had little opportunity for the small economies so very necessary to a small income, only during his short married life was he spared constant irritating, interruptions and claims on his attention, or else the leaving his

affairs to servants more intent on their own gain than his service.

He worked as few men will or can work, but his payments were very uncertain, meagre, and inadequate. His only hope was a Government post which would have left him with enough free time for his own work, but Frederick never had the magnanimity to overlook his first mistake, perhaps, too, he had not the literary culture to appreciate him.

The very projects of travel he planned were tantalising disappointments. He had but just started on a two years' tour when young, as a tutor travelling companion, when the declaration of war stopped the plan. And instead of receiving payment and intellectual profit as he expected, he was involved in a lawsuit with his companion, who disputed some claim he made.

His only other opportunity was an ardently desired journey to Italy. But he had to make it in the suite of his patron, the Duke of Brunswick, who cared only for pomp and ceremony, and thus he had little opportunity for those studies which attracted him irresistibly. It is said that while in Rome he was found in profound reflection before the great group of the Laokoon, but the result of his studies in Italy were lost in a travelling box which went astray and was never recovered. Probably it had no name, but the loss is ours.

He suffered too terribly through his affections; he had a respectful love and esteem for his father, but his home could never have been congenial. Despite his combative disposition, he was a loyal and affectionate friend, and the tie between him and Henrich von Kleist was of the most intimate kind, broken only by that young officer's early death, inflicted some say by his own hand; there is a story that he and a cousin registered a vow of self-destruction in boyhood, and both kept it.

But it was through his love Lessing went through his sharpest anguish. His wife, Eva Konig, was admirably suited to him, but she was already married when he first met her; both were already middle-aged, and there was a painful waiting in a painful position. But Eva Konig's husband died while Lessing was in Italy; he married her on his return, and found at length a haven of rest in a household where he was treated with tender consideration and respect, and where order and economy reigned for the first time. His happiness lasted just a year and a half, then his wife and his new-born son died within a few hours of each other.

I know nothing more pathetic than Lessing's grief for his first-born child. He, who was so learned in many languages, invented a little baby language to describe the movements of the restless, suffering, little head, and laments his loss "because he showed such great, precocious intel-

ligence in at once leaving an unfriendly and hostile world. As soon as he opened his eyes he recognised it." Lessing's own death followed not long after, 1781.

He and Goethe never met; they had the opportunity once, but Goethe was in a wilful mood, and Lessing's death prevented any other chance. But though they never met after the flesh, Goethe appreciated him as no one else in Germany could, though I cannot but think Lessing would have been cheered by his cordial recognition in life, and the cold ear of death was indifferent to his generous praise.

How great and deep was the impression he and his work made on the poet who was to be the glory of Germany can best be estimated by Faust, of which I feel sure Lessing was the original.

The allusion to Lessing's life and many controversies in the first and second part are too numerous and close-fitting to be accidental. There is "Ein Komödiant Konnt einen Pfarrer lehren, ja, wenn der Pfarrer ein Komödiant ist"—words used in the last religious struggle. In Auerbach's cellar, "Leipzig ist ein klein Paris, Und bildet seine Leute"—almost Lessing's very words.

Besides the many allusions to Nicolai and Mendelssohn's views in the *Walpurgis Nacht*, there is a pointed allusion to the Furies, evidently referring to Lessing's new view of them.

But most striking of all is the character of Faust himself, the deeply learned, deeply suffering man, isolated by his profound learning and intellect, unable to console himself with the simple happiness of homely life, the unquestioning faith of ordinary men.

A mere list of all Lessing's works, unfinished as well as finished, would fill many pages; though but little perished in the using, much was thrown aside after some progress had been made, either from over-fatigue or from fastidious discontent.

One of his ambitions was a great drama of *Faust*, of which only a portion of the first scene remains; from it one gathers the work was planned on a grand scale, when the devils and angels would have fought resolutely for Faust's soul.

He was of the most liberal connoisseurship; all good, sincere work appealed to him, whatever might be its form; he revived the study of and interest in the old legends, pointing out the beauties of the old literature, artless and true, which fashionable taste had thrown aside as unfit for cultivated classicists.

His knowledge of English literature, for which he had a profound admiration, was extraordinary, but it strikes one as one of those inconsistencies which make human nature so interesting to study, that among what were then modern authors he

cared the most for the sentimentalists. He must have known *Clarissa Harlowe* thoroughly, and he declared he would willingly have given some years from his own life to have lengthened that of Sterne of all people in the world. If I had to evolve a Lessing out of my "conscientiousness" he is the last author I should have supposed would have appealed to Lessing's sympathies and even to his affection.

Towards the close of his life Lessing became greatly attracted by Eastern literature and theology, and with characteristic independence he studied the writings of Buddha, not to condemn them, but to compare them with other religious writings and to learn from them.

His classical knowledge would need a true scholar to appreciate its fulness and accuracy; but one who is not a scholar may be attracted by the interest he gives his work. He treats the ancients not as belonging to the dead past, but as still full of living interest; he looks on their artistic work not as mere types for our present studies of art, but as representative of the life around them. In his *Antiquärische Briefe* he makes a remarkable study of antique gems, and gives a specially interesting discovery, viz., that the figures with torches, generally supposed to represent loves or cupids, are really the forms under which the ancients represented Death—a statement he proves with much argument and

research, chiefly by means of an interesting comparison between the different figures of death in Renaissance and ancient art.*

His original work is of singular distinction and fine penetration, but considering the special conditions under which it was produced, it is not surprising to find it is wanting in the freedom and abandon which can only be felt and expressed in a thoroughly congenial and appreciative society.

He was one of the great founders of German criticism, and in one department of it he stands, I think, without a rival, viz., in his philosophic analysis and research for the ground principles of art.

As a stylist he stands alone, remarkable in any literature and very wonderful in the German of his day.

It was the crowning pain of his life and work that, though most highly esteemed by the few, he met little general appreciation from a Germany harassed by war and struggling for political existence; he is perhaps more recognised by her now than ever before.

Measured by our present standards, we can see how high he was above his fellows, what valiant work he did, not only as an original and most enlightened writer, but also as pioneer to Goethe

* He points out the ancients never figured Death in the form of a skeleton. May not this have been from the generally prevalent custom of cremation among Greeks and Romans?

and Schiller and the poetic outburst of German literature in the early part of the century, and we place his statue in its solitary niche as a literary reformer and hero such as the world has rarely seen, though it often needs one, and as much now as in the last century.

•

•

•

•

•

•

•

•

•

•

•

•

•

•

•

•

•

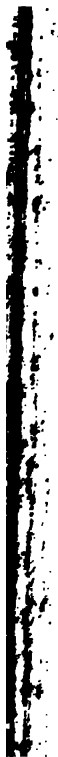
•

•

•



I TEMPI PASSATI



VII

I TEMPI PASSATI

A READER of leisure, sensitive to the attraction of a fine classic, epigrammatic style, who relishes the subtle charm of adroit allusion and enjoys reading between the lines a story within a story, one that could not be told openly without imminent danger to the life and liberty of the writer, will find much that is very interesting and suggestive in *I Discorsi* of Niccolo' Machiavelli. And above and beyond the literary and historic merits of these early political essays is the enigma of the strange personality of their author, whose name has passed into a synonym for base and fraudulent politics and intrigue, who is stigmatised by many as a Mephistopheles all intellect, without heart or morality; a corrupter of governments, a time-server, seeking his own ends through the base flattery of tyrants; by others spoken of as an out-of-date patriot fallen on evil times, which through the cursed spite of fate he could not set right, an enlightened

thinker, misunderstood by contemporaries, and misread by posterity, owing his undeserved notoriety to the fact that he was a chief pioneer in the ways of diplomacy.

When a character presents itself in such protean aspects, I think it only fair that we should, as far as possible, lay aside our preconceived ideas, that we should not read our present high standard into books written in a more artless period, and that we should accept the author's statements as simply conveying his own opinions and convictions; in short, that he means what he says, and that the only interpretation we should use should be our knowledge, at its best, I fear, inadequate, of the moral and intellectual conditions of the age in which he lived.

And with this simple test I am tempted to think that Machiavelli owes his reputation for diabolical cleverness and intrigue less to his want of morality than to a certain stupidity or obtuseness which led him to criticise, in a highly impartial and philosophic spirit, certain prevalent political methods generally practised in his time, but never publicly acknowledged.

It may sound paradoxical to suggest that he has earned his bad reputation by mistaken frankness, but we must remember he lived in a benighted political age, when political crime and ruthless treachery were hardly regarded as criminal, and

when they were extensively practised by the great rulers of Europe, all bent on outwitting each other either by force or fraud. Machiavelli did not invent the special form of politics often called by his name, but he wrote about it, to the great shock of those conscientious rulers of Spain, Italy, and France who did not object to results, but who protested against analysis and revelation of process (such as Machiavelli had used, in his *Il Principe*, published before *I Discorsi*). For it was for these highly placed and educated rulers that Machiavelli wrote, chiefly and exclusively, and naturally from these there soon followed an outcry against such an unveiling of a secret exclusive science, and of what were assumed to be State secrets. To suppose that the keen-witted Florentine wrote for an ordinary general public and general readers, whose minds he sought to deprave by his cold-blooded axioms, is to attribute the nineteenth century attitude to the sixteenth, and to presuppose a popular knowledge and interests in politics which is of comparatively modern growth, and has been fostered by the franchise and the penny daily papers.

It was in a very different political world to ours that Machiavelli lived, when kings, princes, and rulers possessed powers but little modified by responsibility, when, as he himself constantly affirms, the times were corrupt, very corrupt (a statement emphatically confirmed by Ascham

as far as Italy was concerned), and instead of consoling himself with a fair Utopia or some region of the imagination where men and women led lives of virtue, happiness, and freedom under new and impossible conditions, he gazed at the actual world in which he lived with far-seeing, penetrating eyes, examined into the causes which had led to its degeneration, and, above all, strove to fathom the reasons why his well-beloved Florence, so beautiful, and once so free, had fallen from her high estate and was being forced under the yoke of a debasing tyranny. Nor is his work merely literary; he suggests remedies, which he believed, if vigorously pursued, might yet save Florence, for with all his acute observation he can hardly have realised that corruption and vigour are incompatible.

It is of comparatively primitive politics he writes; he had no access to those varied stores of knowledge for comparison and contrast which are at the command of the historian of to-day, his authorities are drawn from that ancient world whose dominant influence on the men of the Renaissance is at once the measure of their strength and weakness; he takes Livy as his text, and he quotes the Bible when he wants to justify a dire political necessity; consequently some of his reasoning seems remote from the pulses which now stir political life and is purely academic, but much is still as fresh as it was

three hundred years ago and could not now be surpassed for weighty judgment.

In the introductory chapter, which has a rare touch of pathos underlying its calm statements, he speaks of the profound admiration excited by the discovery of some fragment of an antique statue, of the high price paid for it, of the reverent skill and care with which it is studied and reproduced, and declares that his aim is to produce the same effect in politics by bringing before his readers specimens of antique virtue, courage, and good government, to inspire them to imitation in these great particulars. He adds he has a poor genius, little experience, but slight knowledge of antiquity, but he is the first worker in this field, and can but trust that others, abler than he, will follow, and that for them he has made a short road to a distant place.

But no one has travelled that road with so firm and confident a tread, with so wide, dispassionate, and disinterested an outlook; and though the experience of three centuries has necessarily disproved some of his conclusions, and discredited some of his convictions, this is rather due to changed conditions, which it was impossible for him to foresee, than to his own want of penetration and foresight.

He is eminently practical, ever correcting and verifying his aspirations and theories by the test of human nature, which he regards with philo-

sophic eyes. And his philosophy has deeply impressed him with the transitoriness of all things, not only of individual life, but also of those institutions and governments which man flatters himself will be permanent, or, at least, long-enduring. To Machiavelli they are but ever-changing phenomena, passing from good to evil, and (but not so readily) from evil to good, and the one problem which ever haunts him, is how the good may be arrested and rendered stable for a time at least; being, too, an artistic Florentine for whom everything must take an orderly and rhythmic form, he traces the sequence of the progressive growth and decay in concrete forms.* First, the Prince gaining pre-eminence from his good governing qualities, then his degenerate heirs, inheriting what he has won by courage and virtue, and using it for oppression and personal ends. A rebellion ensues, headed by the nobles, who establish an oligarchy; but they too submit to the disintegrating, corrupting influences of power, and are driven out by the populace, who have, in their turn, to undergo the same fate, and are overthrown for a princely rule, established on account of the tyranny of the many. It is the wheel of fortune rising and falling through fixed stations of growth, decay, and revival, and suggests successive government by inimical classes,

* Florence was always changing her governments and impressing this lesson of transitoriness on all her great citizens (see canto vi., *Il Purgatorio*).

without common interests rather than by opposing parties, with a fixed rallying-point of principle.

The great aim of Machiavelli was to prevent this constant change, and to secure a form of good and orderly government for as long as possible, and his chief suggestion was, that each government should reform periodically, by going back, as he expresses it, to its first principles. He nowhere actually defines what he considers the first principles of good government, but this is not from vagueness; he is never vague, only he never gives a constitution on paper, rather he assumes each of his readers will work out the problem for himself according to the different countries, and different laws, in which he may be interested. But I gather that his primary principle of government was the proportional representation of all the classes of the city or country. Each was to watch its own interests, and with due vigilance prevent any one class or family from gaining dominant power. (The balance of power, as we shall see later on, was very important in Renaissance politics. Given this balance of interests Machiavelli was prepared to accept princely rule, though he was at heart a staunch, even a devout Republican.)

This return to primitive laws he evidently considers of vital importance to counteract the pernicious influence of prosperity and deadening effects of routine, and he speaks of the great work

of St. Dominic and St. Francis in religion, "for the spiritual power of religion would have been exhausted without the new orders which they founded, returning thus to the first principles of Christ and His poverty," and reviving for the people that "energy of religion so nearly spent by arrogant and worldly prelates." In the same way, he says the governors of Florence from 1434 to 1494 found it constantly necessary to revert to first principles, to strengthen their wavering authority, and impress the people with due fear and respect for their power. Ever true to his rhythmic idea, he fixes five years as the time for the recurring periodical reforms, and adduces the example of the Parliament of Paris to prove his argument.

He evidently believed that the ancient Romans had discovered some at least of these first principles, the enforcement of which had enabled them to maintain order and suppress revolts for a longer time than any other people with whose history he was acquainted, and he sought to impress certain lessons or principles which he found in their history on his fellow-citizens.

Another of his safeguards against tyranny with its too probable companions, tumult and rebellion, was short terms of office, too short for the holder to use it for his own personal ends; and in his jealous watchfulness to close all openings to personal ambition, Machiavelli tried to rouse the

citizens to regard even the work of public benefit rendered by prominent and rich men chiefly as bribes for power.


His political perceptions were so acute that one is apt to forget that his historical knowledge was necessarily, after all, very limited by the conditions of his time, and so one wonders in this problem of securing a permanent yet popular form of government, that he did not anticipate the modern solution, which has stood the test of experience, viz., elective and hereditary power combined yet modifying each the other. But the word hereditary had another significance in his day to ours, and meant rather inherited privilege, than inherited aptitude. He does discuss it, and seems half to discern its value; it was, however, odious to him from his intense hatred of the Medici, that treacherous, tyrannical brood through whose machinations Florence had been enslaved, he himself subjected to physical torture, his legitimate ambitions and career thwarted, his patriotic aspirations doomed to disappointment.

The founder of the family Cosmo had been banished once from the city of the Lilies, but had succeeded in returning, and his descendants, legitimate or otherwise, were trading on his reputation as "father of his country" for their own small personal ambitions and self-glorification, to the ruin of Florence. When speaking of them we catch the only personal note in *I*

Discorsi, faint and quickly suppressed, yet like a slight, sudden ripple on a calm sea, betraying the strong undercurrents in the far depths below.

It is a poignant note which seems to give a curious throb to his virile and generally unimpersonal style, and is most perceptible in a remarkable chapter headed, "How necessary it is in order to maintain newly acquired liberty, to slay the sons of Brutus." It follows the philosophic chapter on the necessity of reform by returning to first principles, and indeed among the first principles to be reverted to Machiavelli had already hinted at that of getting rid by the old Roman heroic method of all who obstruct and disobey the laws, and hinder reform, or sacrifice the public good to self-aggrandisement.

The chapter is very interesting from its three-fold significance. The outward one concerning Brutus, the hardly veiled one hinting plainly at Cosmo dei Medici and his descendants, and yet another which may not have interested the writer, but which cannot fail to appeal to a modern reader very tired of the imitations and excesses of success in politics, art, and literature. For evil is wrought more by pushing good movements to excess under changed conditions, than by malice *prepanse*. It would be a glorious development if Machiavelli's hint could be taken, and a bloodless, intellectual revolution achieved by the sacrifice of the sons of Brutus. They are very



numerous in politics, pushing reform to abuse, out-bidding every popular movement, and sacrificing all principles of moderation and careful balance.

They are as numerous in Art and literature, and impose on the ignorant, who fail to discriminate and cannot recognise the pretentious imitation from the first original and sincere impulse.

If only we could safeguard the necessary reform from the unnecessary sequence, the fine style from the imitators who catch its mannerisms without its distinction, and save ourselves from the hackneyed copying of pictures, which produce only something of the form and nothing of the spirit of the original artists! But unluckily Machiavelli's drastic remedies can no more be tried in the mental than in the physical world.

The chapter is hint enough as to what were Machiavelli's desires and convictions for Florence, and he follows it with one on conspiracies in the same spirit. Of course conspiracies had a different aspect in those days. Then they were often the only possible means of opposing a government which was being carried on with pernicious consequences, and high-minded men risked their lives and fortunes in what seems to us now under-hand devices, without any reproach to their fair fame, especially if they succeeded.

Still it is impossible not to feel that we have here some of those utterances which have blackened Machiavelli's name and made it odious

to the general. It is not that he speaks of conspiring generally, but he evidently desires that its chief object should be the assassination of those who bar the way to reform. (He says in another place that a people may be reformed by alteration of laws, &c., but that the only reform for a prince is *il ferro*.) Nor does he limit himself to *il ferro*; there are difficulties in its use, he therefore discusses poison also. One thinks of his period and of the Borgias, but even then it is impossible not to revolt from the dispassionate way he speaks of crime, and he could give no more convincing proof of the oft-spoken dominant corruption than this, that it had obscured the moral perceptions of even his keen intellect.


Machiavelli was, in short, with all his penetration and patriotic genius, an Italian of the Renaissance, that wonderful period when a seemingly sudden outburst of intense intellectual energy caused the Italians to break through the restraints of consistency, often even of decency, to achieve their ends. An age which contrasts with ours, as intellect was then far in advance of knowledge, and there was no pause for self-analysis. The reaction from an exclusively religious civilisation had led to a sudden confusion of moral laws, while the religious teaching which promised success and prosperity as the rewards of merit having been demonstrated false, men had reversed the statement, and ceased to see any wrong in

means which secured success. A bewildering time, so little understood in our dispassionate days, that we account for its excesses by supposing the men of the Renaissance preternaturally wicked. They certainly had little shame, and spoke openly of what human nature generally hides, but perhaps their imagination led them to exaggerate even their misdoings, and one cannot but hope that a certain chapter of Machiavelli's, in which he inveighs against scandal, was caused by the fact that politicians then had no scruple in murdering the characters of their opponents as well as their bodies, and that some of the terrible stories of that time were heightened by political rancour.

It must be owned, moreover, that there is generally an impatience with reformers to clear the ground for their own work, and that it is shown occasionally at other periods than the Renaissance, on the plea that a desperate State needs desperate remedies. There are those who still justify the *coup d'état* of Napoleon III., and find apologies for dynamitards, placing political crime in a special category of crime, with an excuse which exonerates from all blame, a singular and seemingly very old-fashioned mental attitude.

But even while hinting at his terrible remedies, Machiavelli is not bloodthirsty, merely inexorable; he does not desire blood-shedding for its own sake, but his position seems to have been this: he

found that political crime existed, chiefly among aspiring, ambitious politicians who were so placed that they could dispose of rivals, or other inconvenient persons, with little fear of reprisals. And to him the appalling thing was, that political crime should be so misapplied, so wasted, *i.e.*, that suffering and confusion should be caused without the intended result being gained, without any nearer approach to that free, permanent government he so ardently desired. And he suggested striking the tyrants, who were above and beyond the law, and could be reached in no other way, with their own weapons. He does not even seem to perceive the horror of this legitimising of murder (though he owns it is a scandal to be avoided if possible), few people were shocked at political murder in those days. We know that even great rulers did not always shrink from the employment of assassins, and that many State trials were but judicial murders with a foregone conclusion. But the mere observance of some kind of legal form, though a cruelly false form to us now, at least gave the ordinary people ever, as Machiavelli says, more impressed by the name and appearance of the thing than the thing itself, a perception of the need of legality, the wrong of individual and unauthorised judgment in State matters. And this perception, though it may have been faint at first, served as a shield to foster the feeble, slowly growing sense of justice.



But Machiavelli cared little for the form, if the spirit were absent, he had seen life and had no delusions. I think it is this which at times makes him terrible, and has been the chief cause of his sinister reputation. He neither deceives himself nor others on certain points, and uses no veil of good motives or sophistries to hide the shame of evil deeds, to him they are inseparable from human nature, to be reckoned with, and, if possible, utilised by the practical politician ("and how can he that is already worn out with the corrupted world understand incorruption?").

To Machiavelli mankind is wicked, and therefore needs government which must restrain its lawlessness and punish its excesses. Nor has the government wickedness only to contend against, but also ignorance—dense, inert. The people, says Machiavelli, is a brute animal, naturally ferocious, and loving the woods, brought up in dungeons and solitude, when freed it is unused to finding its own food or dens, and incapable of reasoning or enlightenment, returns under the yoke from which it has been freed; though not yet corrupt, having more good than evil, but having, too, from its late rebellion more enemies than friends among its partisans, who were disappointed at not receiving honours.

It is little the people wants, he continues; that which we should now call the first elements of liberty and civilisation, merely to enjoy its own,

not to have to doubt the honour of its women, not to fear for itself.

He pleads that a prince, respecting these desires, and enjoying the confidence of his subjects, is much more secure than one who excites their enmity, and that there are but two things that the people ardently desire—recovery of its liberty and revenge on those who ensnared it.

His tone is a complete contrast to that now used to the democracy, but Machiavelli is, I think, the first political writer to recognise the people and their political rights and wrongs at all; the help and direction previously shown them had been chiefly religious, given by a sheltering Church which was growing daily more grasping and worldly. And there is nothing scornful in Machiavelli's attitude; rather the whole chapter betrays deep sympathy with an oppressed people, tinged with a faint impatience at that indifference to their own interests which was shaken only by most obvious tyranny.

And this sympathy was direct and sincere; Machiavelli had none of the savage, gloomy satire of Swift, or the gay irony of Disraeli: he is too deadly in earnest to linger over the humorous aspects of life, to be tickled by its inequalities and contrasts, and he discusses political problems and their possible solution with an intensity which blinds him to any possible adverse effect on the reader. The clue to much that is puzzling in

him is to be sought not so much in his individual moral obliquity, as in the extraordinary trend of events in Italy which had forced her intellectually far in advance of all the other nations of Europe, while her political and religious developments were at certain critical periods constantly thwarted and retarded by the overshadowing, conflicting claims of those mighty, imperial, but decaying powers, the Papacy and the Empire.

The figure under which Machiavelli speaks of the people was not unusual in his day; in the collection of Italian sonnets translated by A. J. Symonds there is one where the people is compared to a brute, a brute too of terrible strength and power of which it is as yet unconscious, but which it may any time use for destruction and devastation. It did so use its might some two hundred years afterwards, goaded by its sufferings and excited by flattery, and took its vengeance at last with appalling fierceness.

It is another proof of Machiavelli's assertion that the many are more led and influenced by words than things, that the doctrinaire politicians of the French Revolution who proclaimed the perfectibility and rights of man and used the wrongs of the people as a pedestal for their own egoisms and colossal conceit; who ruined homes and shed innocent blood without scruple for their own theories and promotion, should not be stigmatised as he has been. Yet whatever his

mistakes, he cannot be accused of egoism or paltry ambitions, and he strove always to apply the tests of experience and human nature to his convictions, not because he was a mere hardened cynic, but because he was eminently practical, and could not satisfy himself with visionary reforms, which overlooks the unknown factor human nature—a factor so constantly ignored by literary politicians, but which so constantly falsifies their carefully worked out problems. It is, I think, a convincing proof of Machiavelli's sagacity that all the reforms he suggests were to be developed from the past, from precedent to precedent, and he never suggested making a clean sweep in order to start afresh, rather he would retain the old institution even while giving it new powers, would keep the ancient name for the new departure.

One of Machiavelli's political beliefs universally accepted in Europe in his days, but now much discredited, was the balance of power. The need of making all great nations (and in Italy all cities and parties) keep in line as it were in the great march after progress and power was held of paramount importance. The consequence was, singular efforts as soon as one nation or party or city forged ahead, to abstract a certain amount of influence or territory from it and transfer it to a weaker neighbour—trades guild or trades unionist politics on a large scale.' It evidently

gave much work to diplomatists just rising to great importance, and must often have reduced European politics to a grand conjuring trick, checking, however, free development. It seemed to appeal to Machiavelli's love of symmetry and proportion, and he discusses it at some length.

Interspersed with his keen political observations are equally keen comments on human nature, and he gives, here and there, vivid and interesting historical touches which bring before us some of the special difficulties and dangers of his age, many of them now much modified, others but little changed.

One of his speculations is on the difficulty of young men entering political life, and he wonders if it is possible for a man of scrupulous honour or fastidious feelings to force his way in politics. Then he reverses the case, and with what Macaulay calls his fair-mindedness, trusts that it may be possible that he who has gained power by unscrupulous means may yet use it for worthy purposes; it is a difficult question, hardly as yet fully answered.

In a chapter curiously headed "The necessity in a Republic of [public] accusations that liberty may be maintained," Machiavelli seems to bring before us the eager life of a crowded self-governing city, where one rival blackens the character of another to enhance his own fame and chance of success in public life, and where whispered

scandals destroy the reputation of prominent and conspicuous citizens and paralyse their public work. Machiavelli would substitute legal accusations which can be refuted or proved for these covert scandals which among other things enable corrupt officials to hint at the peculations of others to hide their own sins, and give jealousy free play. And as he ever loves concrete examples above general assertions, he gives as an instance Messer Giovanni Guicciardini, of whom it was said that he had received bribes from Lucca not to succeed in his campaign—accusations which reduced him to despair, and caused his friends to make a party, which was of great injury to the Republic.

Among the dangers which threatened well-established governments and helped to destroy civilisation Machiavelli enumerates certain physical causes which are now, at least as far as Europe is concerned, if not actually overpassed, reduced to a minimum; they are outbreaks of pestilence and famine and inundations which swept away communities and brought down rough and ignorant men from the mountains into the fertile plains, to fill the places which death and destruction had forced the citizens to vacate—men who had no memory of ancient laws and good customs. He seems here to anticipate the modern philosophic historian, with his recognition of the influence of physical conditions in the political development of a country.

Of religion Machiavelli speaks but rarely, but when he does it is with a full perception of its supreme importance to the life of the State, though it must be owned his spirit is rather religious paganism than Christian. This is markedly the case in one chapter, where he accuses the Papal government of neglecting true religion, declares that those who live near Rome are the most irreligious, and that the presence of the Papal court, if removed to Switzerland, would corrupt even that people, who still practise antique, war-like virtues, and asserts that the Papacy, or rather, as he says, the Church, had been the ruin of Italy, as its claim to temporal power prevented the consolidation of a strong government under a Republic or Prince. Considering the Popes of Machiavelli's time his indignation, though perhaps political rather than religious, is not surprising.

That Machiavelli had been reproached with his frank writings seems evident from the concluding chapters of *I Discorsi*, where he speaks of the necessity of self-defence, and quotes Moses, the great lawgiver, who killed so many of the envious who rebelled against his government. He seems to think that if Piero Soderini, and Savonarola (evidently his last hopes for Florence) had only had the resolute courage and insight to have acted in the same way, the city might have been saved. There is no sneer in the allusion, he

thought of Moses only in connection with those questions which interested him so profoundly; and he certainly was not a hypocrite, he does not ever say that the evils wrought by the wickedness of man are from the will of God, but he has the modern perception of consequences and judges accordingly. And not being a hypocrite he cannot accept the doctrine that good people are to place themselves at the mercy of the unscrupulous by observing a strict fidelity, which will bring about their own ruin.

He dwells on the treachery and cruelty shown towards Florence by strangers, the Germans and French, full of avarice, pride, ferocity, and treachery, through which they had many times offended *nostra città*. He proves his statements. Charles VIII. had taken money several times for the fortresses of Pisa, and then had not yielded them, showing in this his lack of truth and his avarice. The Emperor had taken money to side with the Florentines against the Visconti, and then had stopped short at Verona. And if Florence had not been constrained by necessity and conquered by passion, and had only read and studied these customs of the Barbarians, she had not been so often deceived by them.

This questioning as to propriety of allowing oneself to be overreached by an unscrupulous opponent may show that the trite old belief that success was the immediate and inevitable reward

of goodness was being shaken, and that certain forms of charitable confidence and trust in others, whose interest it is to deceive and betray, were found not Christian virtues, but merely disguised forms of selfishness and indolence.

Though Machiavelli does not make a direct reference to the old Roman law, which gave a certain sanction to what we should now consider sharp practice and overreaching, he probably had it in his mind when he wrote this; but however this might have been, he evidently did not consider that the conduct of the Florentines in these matters was prompted by high motives. He had much of the stern, stoic regard for public duty and the civic patriotism of an old pagan—indeed in that licentious poetic society of Florence he shows as some singular sport of Atavism. He was not a virtuous man personally, but he did not appreciate the great growth of fine sentiments which had developed profession far beyond the possibility of immediate practice (I speak of course only of *I tempi passati*), and had made the old Doric mode of harmonious thought and action more than ever difficult, well-nigh impossible.

He did not profess without practising; he did not make political capital out of the sufferings of his country; as far as she would let him, he served her disinterestedly, and did and suffered for her in a way which was heroic rather than martyr-like. He spent great energy and genius,

for instance, in striving to carry out one of his strongest convictions, one which the world has lately professed to doubt, but which was the pivot of all Machiavelli's political life, viz., the duty of maintaining a strong military power, to support the moral force of a government.

It was a duty which Florence together with Italy had allowed herself to neglect. I will not say that the Italians "recoiled from danger and knew not shame," but they had delegated their military as their religious responsibilities to others, and were chiefly interested in other matters. The natural result followed, and they found, as all do, that they were unable to give up their duties to others, and protect their interests themselves.

Many causes had fostered this non-militant spirit, the Italians had never been zealous Crusaders, they had always regarded the great feudal lords as tyrants, from whose yoke they soon escaped by the rapid growth of towns, whose independence had been favoured by both Pope and Emperor until it threatened their own headship. They had in them none of the religious warlike fervour from which the Puritan or the Covenanter was developed. But their intellectual abilities had shown them a means which seemed to offer an escape from the drudgery of military service, without exposing themselves to the dangers of spoliation. They called to their aid

mercenary soldiers, but the men who fought for pay only, naturally from good sound business principles spared themselves as much as possible, and when they were confronted by other mercenaries, who acted in the same way, war became indeed a kriegspiel.


Machiavelli saw the infinite temptation and peril of having goods without the strong man armed to keep them, and believed that the only hope for Italy was a return to the military organisations which had enabled her to achieve so much in her past days of glory. He therefore worked hard at organising the military of Florence, and studied military problems ardently from every point. Many of his chapters are devoted to weighing the value of artillery, the use of fortresses, whether it is better to stand on the defensive, or to attack first, &c.; and he treats all these seemingly dry, technical questions with a vividness and mastery which makes them still interesting.

Curiously his only approving mention of England is that, in time of peace, she was ready for war, and so, when it broke out, had an advantage over France. Switzerland greatly excited his admiration, for her stalwart soldiers and ancient form of government, and sometimes he speaks wistfully of an agricultural Republic, where all are poor, yet content because all are equal; he seemed to foresee the special difficulties

of Republics with great commerce and possessions, and he devotes one chapter to the emphatic denial that money is the great nerve of war; without the true military spirit and courage money can do nothing. But, as usual, he ever seeks his model and example in Rome, and gives many instances of their superior military genius, though in deciding on the advantage of the infantry over the artillery he was doubtless influenced by the then recent experience at Senpach; but in all these details he still keeps to general views as well.

He does not look on the army merely as a means of victory, but also as fostering the heroic virtues of endurance, self-control, obedience, and discipline. He has the highest standard of an officer's duties, and of the confidence with which he should inspire his men, he esteems the moral effect of victory as highly as Stonewall Jackson, and he anticipates the Duke of Wellington in considering the chase a means of training soldiers in hardihood, and teaching them to observe the natural features of the country in which they may have to fight.

The chapter in which he points this out is of singular charm, and breathes of long nights spent on the Apennines ensnaring birds, while the sportsman's mind was occupied by the fate of the beautiful city which lay below him, by the swift-flowing Arno. For her sake he notes the



rise of the mountain, the fall of the valley, sees the weak place where she may be attacked, speculates as to the best method of her defence, and writes of all in a way which shows that he had as keen eyes for the beauties of nature as of art, and that like an old Florentine of the Renaissance, he was sensitive to every influence of beauty or power which could appeal to man.

Curiously enough, Machiavelli's insight has been proved right in the present generation by the disaster of Majuba Hill, when the Boers unquestionably owed the victory to their physical powers, trained in hunting, and to their accurate shooting, which was due to other than target practice.

But it is hardly possible in a description, perhaps not even in translations, to do full justice to the keenness of insight, the grip on the practical as well as the theoretic side of politics shown by Machiavelli in *I Discorsi*; the mere headings of the chapters are admirable political maxims, and they state political problems with singular and incisive clearness.

This highly endowed man had a cruel and thwarted destiny; everywhere his work was frustrated, even that military work which in the then state of Florence seemed so obviously imperative, and the grave itself has not hidden him from reproach. He was of those who consider it their chief duty in writing to observe and

record without a chorus of praise or blame, but his constant allusions to the corruption of his times might save him from the gratuitous assumption that he approved them, and at least he should have the credit due to him.

He was, as he claimed to be, the first philosophic writer of politics, what may be termed applied politics, to which the tests of experience and historic study are constantly applied. He watched and noted the swing of the pendulum in the mental, as Galileo in the physical world; he saw life, and perceived the significance and connection of seemingly unassociated things, and he anticipated much modern thought. He was, perhaps, the first to express his consciousness that the mental or intellectual world is governed by law, as is the physical, and he alludes to the great underlying forces of society ever striving to influence its form, as powers weightier even than politics, though the two act and re-act on each other, sometimes giving, sometimes receiving, impulse and impress from each other.

Lately this problem of cause and sequence in what seems at first glance the great kingdom of chance and accident, this intimate connection between human nature and the forms of government by which it strives to regulate itself, have occupied many thinkers, but the laws of this mental and political science are yet to find, and we are but little nearer the scientific solution of

this most interesting problem. Practical experience and self-interest have indeed taught us much, specially during the last two centuries, but the ideal government which gives full development to all and does not assign too high a position to the accidents of wealth and birth, is as yet very far off, as far off, perhaps, as when Machiavelli strove to discover it.

If we desire to trace the early story of any advance or development in the arts and sciences, and go back to its first origins, we know that we shall find in the work of its remote discoverers or founders much that seems to us strangely ignorant—statements in science or history that a mere schoolboy would not make now, not because he is cleverer than the original genius, but because he has access to the accumulated knowledge and experience of later workers, following the pioneer taking advantage of his works, and correcting his errors. And we do not judge the genius of by-gone days by his ignorance and mistakes, but honour and esteem him for his gifts, and appreciate the causes of his deficiencies. This has not been the case with Machiavelli; his genius, his passionate love of freedom and Florence have been forgotten, and his evil reputation accepted without inquiry, even in an age of historic research. I cannot say he is still misread, for I think he has very rarely been read, though he would repay study and stimulate thought.

Alone among the great men of the Renaissance he fully appreciated the political situation of Florence and Italy, and proud as he was of their marvellous achievements in art, science, and literature, he perceived that they were, after all, the sunset glories of an extraordinary intellectual period, and that the national life of the people was perishing and sinking into darkness from political and religious corruption and indifference. As Savonarola represented the baffled religious reformer of Italy, Machiavelli represented the baffled political reformer, on what we should now perhaps call the rationalistic side; and while the name of the one still commands respect and interest (specially from those who visit Florence) the name of the other is traduced, and his work ignored. Doubtless the religious reforms and sensational martyrdom of the Prior of San Marco appeal most forcibly to the sentiments and imagination of men and women, but Machiavelli's aspirations for Florence and his desires for her political reform were as devoted and as sincere as those of Savonarola for her religious regeneration.

Machiavelli always speaks of the great friar with much respect, recognising the pressing need of religious as of political reforms, but he is doubtful of his prophetic gifts, thinking he may have deceived himself. (Evidently the desire to pierce the veil was as strong among

the Florentines then as it is now among other civilised nations, only their forecasts took a more poetic and Biblical form than those of modern spiritualists. Machiavelli was not one to be deluded by this prophetic spirit, but he has some interesting speculations as to the possibility of foreseeing future events, by the careful study of past ones.)

In one instance he openly condemns Savonarola, viz., in that of not observing that law of appeal to the populace against the death sentence passed by the Otto and La Signoria in State cases. Savonarola had himself obtained this law by great efforts, and then a short time afterwards had prevented its use for his own purposes; revealing thus, as Machiavelli says, his ambitions and partisanship, though he acknowledges that his writings show the talent, prudence, and power of his soul.

It would seem that this breach of faith, this low standard of political morality, was a disappointing blow to Machiavelli, and he traces the decay of Savonarola's influence to this cause. It is a striking comment on the indifference to human life, and the brutal means which were used in those days, in Europe in general, and Italy in particular, for political and religious ends, that a man of high ecclesiastical position and still higher religious reputation, should have deliberately allowed five citizens to be judi-

cially murdered, without even allowing them the chance of escape by a law he had himself made.

It may be futile, but it is rather fascinating, to speculate as to what Machiavelli's work and fate might have been in modern times; perhaps a splendidly able writer on contemporary politics, one of those extraordinary forces in the political world, a man who supplies the brains and knowledge to more conspicuous and popular party leaders. He could, I think, never have become a popular leader himself, except maybe in some special crisis or great difficulty, he was generally too philosophic and reasoning for a leader, saw both sides too plainly, was not vehemently sympathetic, and was quite without that passionate power of self-deceit and self-belief which helps greatly to carry many men into power, and seems necessary to their success.

One wonders, too, what would now be his judgment of Republican virtues and incorruptibility, as exemplified in modern Republics, what his verdict on the relative values of election and hereditary succession. What would he think of his own beloved Italy? Would he see in her long-deferred consolidation as a nation, in her freedom from foreign rule and the temporal power of the Pope, the realisation of his aspirations, and recognise great forces of progress which may yet lift her into a high place among nations and revive her ancient glories? Or would he still lament

the corruptions of the time, and instead of looking forward hopefully retain his pagan attitude, and turn his longing gaze to the golden age of the past, and lament for the austere heroic, war-like virtues of *I tempi passati*? What, above all, would he think of the insolent death sentence passed by the Barbarians on that great Latin race whose imperial and intellectual powers had so impressed his imagination? Would he accept it with his habitual philosophic calm, and apply to it also his great doctrine of transitoriness and change, recognising that even the greatest of conquering and governing peoples must, through lapse of time, and the great law of nature, be at last relegated to *I tempi passati* and *Le Cose passate*.

.



ORIGINALITY




VIII

ORIGINALITY

WHEN the student of literature first begins honest study instead of mere reading, he opens every fresh book with a glowing sense of expectancy, for will he not find there new ideas, struck out by some master mind with which he comes into contact for the first time? The sensation is exhilarating, the world is suddenly enlarged for him, it is full of infinite possibilities, of hitherto unsuspected significances; he feels of larger growth personally, has a consciousness of deeper, clearer knowledge, and listens to the everyday speech of his everyday friends with a certain condescension, as of one who has the *entrée* into a grand society of which ordinary folk know but little—a society whose members recognise each other by the freemasonry of certain words and expressions, the outward and visible signs of an inward and spiritual grace which marks an exclusive class. The reproach of the commonplace and trite is constantly in his heart,

if not on his lips, until, having read much, he begins to think a little, and discovers that many of his new friends are, after all, but old ones in a different dress. Worse still, that some of the great thinkers for whom he has so profound a respect have shown no scruple in helping themselves to the treasures of others, very often without the slightest acknowledgment. As he pierces deeper and deeper below the surface, farther and farther into the books of the past, he finds, to his surprise, not the abysmal stupidities he expected, but that the sayings which seemed so striking in some modern author were first said or written some thousand years ago, most probably in that wonderful and unsurpassable Greek literature, and that they have been passed from book to book as heirlooms of thought, that all might use who had the wit. Moreover, the chances are that the Greeks themselves may have inherited from some still more remote source, and merely enriched their treasure trove with their own fair fancy and beautiful language.

The discovery is generally a shock to sensitive consciences, and I fear in some cases the first uncritical rapture hardly survives. But it is the unreasoning regret of the ignorant, and arises chiefly from a supposition that originality must be generated in vacuum, isolated from all previous thought, is in fact a kind of mental spontaneous fire, arising from the intense heat



of a self-fed imagination—a view which was very general before the discovery of those wonderful words development and evolution, which account grandly for much we do not understand.

These cabalistic expressions break the next shock which awaits the student, viz., that ideas themselves are seemingly limited in number, though their manifestations and expressions are many and varied. We therefore must meet the same thought or image over and over again, but we feel bound to say now, not that the users of it have stolen it from one another, but that they have developed it. Probably, too, we add the “blessed words” mental cerebration, which account for everything by some law of mysterious sympathy and sequence, as though using certain expressions touched a hidden spring in the brain of listener or reader, which forces out certain responsive thoughts or words in inevitable sequence.

These theories have much to commend them and make the old-fashioned criticisms of unenlightened days, when every work was judged strictly on its own merits, and was supposed to be spun out of its author's brain, as a spider spins its web out of its body, seem strangely inadequate and futile.

I remember, for instance, years ago coming across a sentence of Miss Martineau's in which

she declared her former deep admiration for Shakespeare had been destroyed by finding that he was not the one dramatist of his age, but only a fine pre-eminent one among many. This being the case, she no longer regarded him as so very extraordinary, and this attitude is not, perhaps, a rare one.

It is as reasonable as though we should expect Mont Blanc to arise out of a stretch of flat tableland, and deny his grandeur and supremacy when we find him merely the loftiest peak of a chain of mountains. And I suppose if Miss Martineau had lived in these keenly critical and inquiring days, when some part of the veil has been torn from Shakespeare's mystery, portions of his work traced to many different sources, and the accusations of his enraged contemporaries received a seeming justification, she would have condemned his plays altogether in the interests of higher literary morality.

Yet Shakespeare was no hardened thief, stealing others' thoughts, and was but one of a glorious band who seized whatever they wanted, and honoured and immortalised those from whom they pilfered. All "original genius" does it; there are instances innumerable. Raphael appropriated a figure from Masaccio when he wanted an effective one; Handel laid royal hands on any melody he fancied. Even the lofty Wordsworth did not wholly conquer temptation, picking up a jewel when

he found it, and setting it in his own coronal, as Vaughan and Spenser can testify. And these men were well within their rights; that which they lifted would have perished in the using, or probably been neglected or forgotten but for their appreciating appropriation. Under their transforming touch it gained new life. If a thought could be patented there are many would do it; but some thinkers are much more valuable as stokers and helpers than in grudgingly building up a little fame for themselves. For Genius is like some great king who has a right to levy tribute wherever he can for the glory and magnificence of the court and nation. And we must ever remember if great men use a thought they have not first originated they are not quoters without the marks; they are polishers and glorifiers too, they take the half-wrought metal, and coin it to enrich the world's treasury.

If a quite rigid law of copyright in thoughts and words could be strictly enforced, most of the work in all the arts, as well as in literature, would be arrested, and we should have the heavenly half-hour of complete silence of the Revelations. Though this sounds delightful, it would have its disadvantages; as the law of waste which Nature forces us to recognise in the physical world—

“Of fifty seeds,
She often brings but one to bear,”

seems also to dominate the mental world, where

much indifferent work may be necessary to the production and reproduction of that which is worth the keeping. And originality seems to resolve itself rather into the way in which a thought is expressed than in the thought itself, and exists in manner full as much as in matter, in that singular personal gift of style which enables some writers to throw a halo round a thought which has been expressed over and over again without impressing the reader. And so at length the student reconciles himself to the inevitable, and agrees with La Bruyère that though all has been said, it is necessary to say it over and over again, to make it our own, to wipe, as it were, the dust of ages off it and keep it fresh.

And thus reconciled, he finds at length a new pleasure to replace his first fresh enthusiasm, that, viz., of tracing literary pedigrees, tracking a striking thought or figure back to what seems its earliest form. To enjoy this sport in perfection it is, I suppose, necessary to know those treasures of literary expression, the classics. Many and many an essay of Addison's, for instance, could be traced back to them, yet who should deny him originality? Not for what he says, but for how he says it, and for that he brought literature from the study into the drawing-room, so making it accessible to all.

And without classical erudition, much good

sport can be had by those who cultivate their memory and read with attention. There are some poems which seem to be written as happy hunting grounds for this type of reader. *In Memoriam* is a splendid example, where a natural grief is embalmed in the spices of poetry and study, so that its lyrics remind us of the cerecloths and cases which the old Egyptians placed round their dead, and which we have lately found to be palimpsests of the deepest interest.

Lord Tennyson has himself denied the study of the poems of Lord Herbert of Cherbury, and therefore the singular resemblance between verses in *In Memoriam* and Lord Herbert's work (pointed out very many years ago in the *Saturday Review*) must be accounted for by the fact that two poets speaking of love, and desiring its spiritual and eternal duration, using the same thoughts and the same metre, very naturally produced very similar verses.

A much more decided and interesting adaption is to be found in the earlier part of the poem iv. verse iii.—

“Break thou deep vase of chilling tears,
That grief hath shaken into frost.”

It is, perhaps, the first purely scientific metaphor in modern poetry, and of course alludes to the well-known fact that a vessel containing water already below 32 degrees freezes instantly if

shaken. It is curious that Tennyson (who, if I remember rightly, did not love science) should have been the first to use this figure ; but it was not original with him. He took it from Goethe's *Aus Meinem Leben, Wahrheit und Dichtung*, where it is much more explanatory. Goethe says, "I suddenly heard of the death of Jerusalem (a friend who shot himself), and directly after the general news I had the most full and complete description of the occurrence, and in that moment the plot of *Werther* was found. The whole shot together from all sides, and became a solid mass, like water in a vessel which is just at freezing-point is turned into firm ice through the slightest shake."

Tennyson makes this image his own by his firm yet graceful style, and condenses into two lines what Goethe needed a longish sentence for. We find the same metaphor in Carlyle, and George Eliot, in *Middlemarch*, speaks of "the crystallising feather touch;" but Tennyson's is by far the finest and most appropriate use of it.

And Goethe was undoubtedly the poet of the clear harp in the beginning of *In Memoriam*, for again we find in *Wahrheit und Dichtung*, "Step by step in ever growing sequence to reach the highest." Indeed, Goethe is one of those mighty minds, like a generous, grand mountain torrent, never pausing on its way to the ocean, but feeding

many a river stream to overflowing, and making the land fertile for miles round.

And there are many authors (chiefly perhaps of the old-fashioned style) little read themselves, but whose works are rich mines for the man or woman of letters. Robert Burton, for instance, himself a magnificent quoter, and Jean Paul. Much has been lifted from both of them with small fear of discovery; they live in fragments, which give an air of originality to those who quarried for their gold. However, it is their salvation; neither of them would have much chance of being read in these days except by the few, their rich veins of valuable ore having to be dug for through tedious and long effort, but both yield still valuable material for the building of new works.

(Jean Paul is specially rich in metaphors, and I commend one but little noticed to any who may care to use it; it is the comparison of progress to a balloon which rises ever higher and higher the more the ballast is thrown overboard.)

And besides this obvious thought-stealing, there are in literature (as in art and science) strange coincidences, when the same thought has occurred to different authors, sometimes in different countries. Alphonse Daudet, for instance, stated that before he had read *Our Mutual Friend* he had, in *Froment jeune and Rislee aîné*, invented Miss Wren, even to the doll's dress-making, and then had to alter her, to guard himself from the charge

of plagiarism. Quite recently Cherbuliez has given a fortune-telling scene in *Le Secret d'un Precepteur* which is very like the one in *Jane Eyre*. Nor is it only in occasional scenes or passages that these coincidences happen. No sooner is a subject in the air than several books appear simultaneously, but without connection; and lucky is he who is first in the field. Some projected books have to be silently and sadly suppressed by their authors in the MS. stage from having been anticipated.

It would be, however, tedious to multiply pedigrees and instances here; it is much more interesting for each reader to do this for himself or herself, and the more remote and obscure the pedigrees are, the greater the triumph of finding them. In some writers they are too obvious to be interesting; there are authors who have read so much, and remembered so conscientiously, that when they want to express anything it comes to them in some one else's words. Theirs is merely mosaic work of quotations and wares of Autolycus, displayed with the saving clause of "as So-and-so says," "but So-and-so expresses this much better than I could." In contrast to this clumsy work one recognises at last that there is much originality in felicitous dainty quotation where the borrowed ornament is a true decoration carefully wrought into the original work. Still there is a rare and singular charm

in authors who never quote, or quote very economically, and either study life, or master the thoughts which others have prompted, and express them in their own style; specially if it is a sincere and not merely conventional one.

It is the burning desire to be original, even by proxy, that leads so many writers to search diligently and rejoice greatly when they discover some old and half or wholly forgotten author, and are able to reintroduce him to society. Sometimes they have not the decency to await the forgetfulness and lift audaciously in the clear light of memory, building up for themselves a certain reputation on others' work—this is conspicuously the case with certain sentimentalists, who cover their sins with a gentle air of innocence, and often indulge in much indignation at any infringement of rights.

Again, there are authors who borrow from themselves; they produce one work with striking characters or effects, and reproduce them in all their subsequent work, with just a slight variation. The colour of the heroine's hair may be changed from fair to dark, her lover may be richer or poorer, older or younger, but they are still the same lovers, and the same ideas dominate the work, one is a sample of all. Even writers of considerable power often sink into the groove of their own making, and too soon their characters

become puppets, moving mechanically and saying much the same things.

It seems extraordinary that with the vast range of life to study from and describe, novelists should be so constantly at a loss for something fresh, the best of them soon dropping into conventionality; and when conscious of this, their efforts to extricate themselves are often ludicrous, dismally sensational, or very affected. So many of them begin to write before they really know anything of life, that their sense of observation, discrimination, and comparison has had no training, and some of them at least study books rather than life.

And even when they do turn to life, they choose only well-worn incidents, and limit themselves only to certain phases; they seem to have no grasp of its endless variety, but give their conventional versions, their sad or happy endings, as though every one's hard struggle were rounded off neatly like the third volume of an old-fashioned novel.

And yet certain recent publications and biographies, in these days when everything is turned to "copy," have given much pleasure to the lovers of romance and gone far to prove that after all actual life is more original than fiction, if only people would study it first hand. In the meanwhile it seems extraordinary how, with wide-reaching interests, men contrive to stay so tenaciously in well-worn tracks; many clergy-

men, for instance, manage to divest their sermons of anything like originality and freshness in thought or expression. The subjects of which the preachers treat—life and death, sin and goodness, all the great mysteries and wonders which surround us—offer, it would seem, endless suggestions of changing interests, yet for the most part they are content to give their listeners the dry outlines of a well-worn theology, and are wholly academic. It was not thus that the great religious teachers of the past, from whom clergymen profess to hold their commissions, established their influence and enforced their principles. They were all eminently original, looking at life not through the distorting, narrowing medium of conventionality and dogmatic custom, but fearlessly and for themselves. But the long lapse of years has worn away the newness from their teaching, and it is only by an effort of thought and study that we can realise how original they must have been. Moses, for instance, was brought up in all the wisdom of the Egyptians, and we know that their religion was rooted in strictest ancestor worship, therefore his proclamation of a God of the present may well have alarmed Pharaoh and seemed revolutionary doctrine.

And still more original must have been Christ's teaching when, amidst a fiercely conservative Eastern people, He did *not* condemn the woman

only, and when He set a little child in their midst and turned man's thoughts from the pride of ancestry, from his glory in descent from Abraham (or some other great hero) to consideration of the living child, from the dead past to the present and the hopeful future. The chief note of difference between the ancients and the moderns is that the former look wistfully back at a golden past, the latter ever forwards, to a glowing future. Joubert noticed this long ago; he did not, however, trace this essential difference to what must have been its prompting motive, viz., differing creeds; nor date its earliest manifestation to that significant action of Christ's which showed the profound change beginning to influence religious development.

But as we are for ever sinking indolently into passive conventionality and academic indifference, we soon cease to recognise any originality in anything in our ordinary life, and fancy it can exist only in some strong sensation, or bizarre affectation. And when any new teaching, specially religious teaching, is offered to the ordinary man, according to his wont he generally takes just so much as suits him and stiffens it into dogma.

And it is a general error to suppose that some revolutionary and revealing idea has any immediate or even very rapid results, for long and long it but modifies existing convictions and struggles for its

own existence (unless it has some immediate practical utility). Thus even Christianity, reaching us through that great highway of the nations, imperial Rome, was in its early developments and organisation much tinctured by her laws and aspirations and by her slowly decaying religious convictions. And a certain conservatism, and reluctance to accept new thoughts, specially in religion, may be the highest wisdom, for true originality must ever be rare, and is often difficult to fathom.

In the meanwhile we find that once originality has vindicated its existence by success, it is highly prized as a hall of genius, a mark by the by often counterfeited. And so in bygone days when women were agitating for higher education, the fact that they had done no original work, specially in poetry, was urged as proof of their inferior intellect, "They hunt old trails," said Cyril, "very well. But when did woman ever yet invent?"

It was an illogical assumption, and showed a strange ignorance of the conditions of originality, for it seemed to presuppose it as a force or energy independent of education. "And did they bid you banish pride? and mind your oriental tinting; and did you learn how Dido died? And who found out the art of printing?" asked Mackworth Praed.

The long training and teaching which men had had was ignored as a factor in their intellectual

superiority and originality, yet if these were heaven-sent, or inborn, the developing and costly education was superfluous for them. And obviously no man is asked to give evidence of marked original power before he is admitted to any profession, there would be little complaint of over-crowding in that case.

In the meanwhile there may be some truth in the charge though a mistake in the application. Anyhow, women have been in such a hurry to wipe off the reproach that they have rushed into careers of Art and literature with little personal endowment, never realising how much more original it is to do a small thing perfectly than to fail in a great thing.

Originality, even when shown in small things, would seem to be a quick insight or imagination, a power of rapid comparison or selection, and as these endowments generally imply considerable culture, is it not a mistake to expect this fine flower of intellect from the ignorant? There are, however, those who evidently regard education as stifling originality, and attribute to the untaught a keenness of perception which is more likely to be diminished than increased by instruction and training. There are, indeed, sometimes to be found among the ignorant people of observation, unfettered by conventionality, who use picturesque and startling expressions, but they are very rare, and as a rule the untaught

are not only not original themselves, but they have a profound distrust of any originality in others.

The poor may speak of sweeping reforms in the constitution and in politics, when rank and wealth are to be abolished for their benefit, but venture to suggest some small reform of everyday life and their social conversation is roused at once. This is conspicuously the case in matters where one could have expected they would gladly have welcomed a change, as, for instance, in burial and mourning customs. The poor suffer naturally most from these, but they cling to them tenaciously, the more unenlightened constantly declaring they dare not do as they would in face of the reproaches that would be made. In any change of this kind the new idea must be worked in, and very, very slowly, and its results will probably not show for years.

Indeed, notwithstanding the reasoning powers of humanity, any change of conventional habit and conviction seems to need almost as long a time as the unreasoning animal requires to develop some organ necessary for its well-being. And many of man's ideas seem at first merely instinctive and unaccountable, but in this stage they cease after a time to be vigorous, prompting motives to action. They die down, but by and by they are re-discovered as original ideas, argued about and at length scientifically

reasoned out. For instance, the comparatively ignorant Hindoo is said years ago to have hammered out certain observances for times of plague and infectious disease, and though he could give no logical reason for them except remote religious ones, modern sanitary science pronounces most of them admirable.

It is much the same with the great modern idea of heredity; it existed for long as subconsciousness of humanity, haunting it with a constant sense of dread.

Moreover, manifestations of man's intellect which resolve themselves into new thoughts, even the grandest mental conceptions of humanity, can be reduced into certain fundamental ideas or aspirations which it expresses over and over in varying forms. Thus mankind seems to have ever haunting desires for continuity and unity; we find them constantly dominant, but varying in form with the special needs and aspirations of the time. Those great religious and political ideals which influenced the Middle Ages—the Roman Catholic Church, the Holy Roman Empire—are really based on these same yearning desires of humanity. The modern doctrine of evolution does but repeat them in another form, physical and scientific instead of religious or political.

Whenever man thinks grandly in Art or science or literature or government he seems forced to

give utterance to these aspirations; they underlie his noblest work, they express the desire of his soul, they hint at his unceasing wonder at, and sense of injustice at the constant interruption of death, they formulate his thwarted convictions of permanence and continued life. But even these imposing forms of thought grow in time conventional, cease to be living exponents of man's desire, and perish. Then there is a pause when men ask themselves, "For what can the man do who cometh after the king? Even that which hath already been done."

And as with the great, so with the smaller developments of life; the beautiful thought or expression is repeated till it becomes tediously familiar, the artistic pattern stereotyped, the sweet *mélody* a prey to the barrel-organ. Then a period of forgetfulness and neglect, followed after a time by recovery, supposed discovery and a sense of newly acquired possession—*plus ça change, plus c'est la même chose*.

And so originality does not spring up spontaneously in isolation and, we will hope, cannot be crushed by education, though routine may in some cases divert it from its channels. Neither does it seem possible that any great thought can be isolated, or spring suddenly from untrained minds. Nor does it need exceptional conditions or grand sensations; there is more originality in Miss Austen's descriptions of ordinary people

in her polished style than in the spasmodic efforts, shoddy theology, and remarkable science of many a modern novel.*

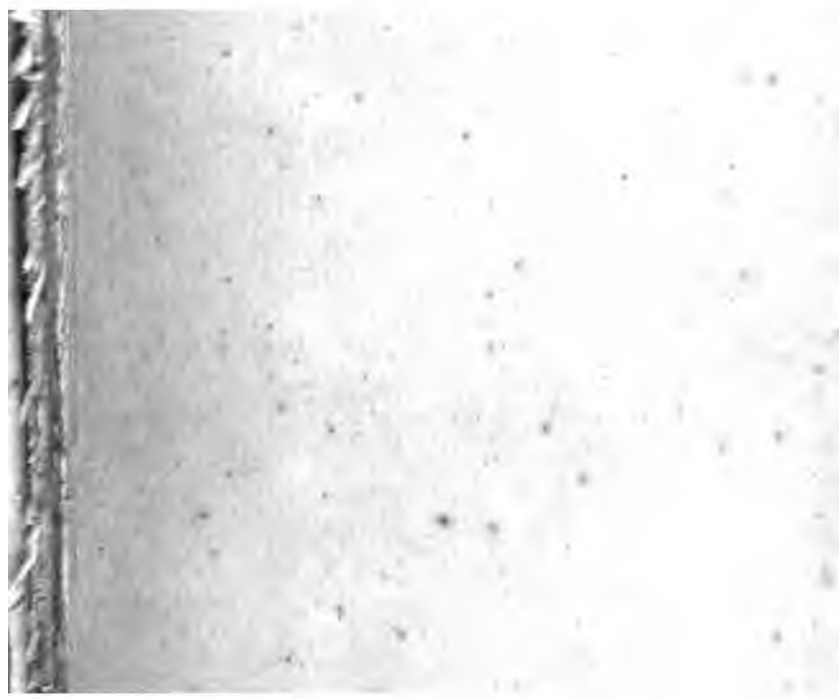
For the chief factor of originality is sincerity, artistic sincerity, which does not write, or paint, or make music for mere money or fame, but because there is something to say, and a new way of saying an old thought, accompanied by the recognition that when some special form has been worn out a new one must be found for the old thoughts to prevent their stiffening into conventionality and hollowness, and that eccentricity, bizarre effects and exaggerations are not originality, but evidences of weakness trying to pose as strength.

Moreover, to look for originality among the uneducated is a hopeless search, for as Goethe, perhaps the wisest of poets, declares—

“The quidnunc says I'm of no school,
No master taught *me* use of tool,
And from the dead I've nothing learned;
My wisdom's store, myself have earned.
Which means, I think, if right I take him,
I stand a fool of my own making.”

* Since writing this, I have come across the following sentence in Pascal: “A mesure qu'on a plus d'esprit, on trouve qu'il y a plus d'hommes originaux. Les gens du commune ne trouvant pas de difference entre les hommes.”





PR 4883 .L27 L5

C.1

Life and books,

Stanford University Libraries



3 6105 034 356 084

DATE DUE			

STANFORD UNIVERSITY LIBRARIES
STANFORD, CALIFORNIA 94305-6004

